

Newsletter

HELP EXPAND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES



*Celebrating 30—
years of service*

A MESSAGE FROM JANET

30 YEARS OF SERVING PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Little did we know in 1992 that 30 years later we would still be serving adults and children with a broad spectrum of disabilities. In 1993, using adapted tennis, HERO began working with WARC, BOCES - Harrison, St. Vincent's Hospital, Vernon Plaza, Southeast Consortium, Community Living Corporation, Young Adult Institute, Rose Simon Day Camp and BOCES Yorktown, serving people living with developmental disabilities, mental illness, behavioral issues and learning disabilities.



Working cooperatively with tennis facilities, parks and recreation departments and hospitals, HERO retained these groups and steadily grew. By 2022, we had served 18,000 individuals living with autism, developmental disabilities, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, mental illness, traumatic brain injury, visual and hearing impairments, PTSD, and those termed at-risk.

Along side this effort, HERO developed adaptive karate, pet therapy, yoga, dance, percussion and craft programs.

And we did this on a “shoe-string” budget while competing with fund raising campaigns for 9/11, the Tsunami, Hurricane Sandy and several other natural disasters.

We are of course very grateful to our loyal supporters and organizations like USTA/Eastern, the Pines Bridge Foundation and facilities who have generously donated money and valuable recreation space towards our mission.

HERO hopes to restart many of our programs, suspended due to COVID-19, in the Spring of 2023. We look forward to another 30 years of bringing “fun, fitness and positive social experiences” to very special adults and children!



Our Mission

**PROVIDE QUALITY RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES
FOR ALL PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.**

MEET OUR BOARD



JANET LEFKOWITZ
CO-FOUNDER
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, SECRETARY

Janet co-founded HERO, Inc in 1992. Over the past thirty years HERO's recreation programs have served over 18,000 underserved, socially isolated adults and children in NYC metro area living with intellectual, social and physical challenges. Since 1992 she has concurrently served as Tennis Director for the Town of Greenburgh, NY in Westchester County where she participates in programs for youth, teens, adults living with autism and wounded veterans. She wrote the first adaptive tennis curriculum for the USTA and is a recognized leader in adaptive recreation. She lives with her husband in Hartsdale, NY and is the mother of two adult children.



JERRY WEIL
PRESIDENT



SUE PLATH
TREASURER



HAILEY CALLANAN



ROBYN PASTERNAK

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of HERO,



As the father of a son with ASD I know what social interaction, joy of play and self-confidence can mean to people living with disabilities - it changes lives. In our 30th year of service HERO changes lives by lighting the world of the people that need it by showing them they can hit a ball, be a teammate, play a game and have some fun with others.

We are broader than a tennis organization. We leverage adaptive tennis (and other activities) to change the lives of our participants. Come join us by volunteering in one of our programs. I guarantee YOU will get even more out of it than our program participants. As Janet likes to say, "it's better than any drug."

Janet Lefkowitz founded HERO 30 years ago- an amazing legacy! She inspires all of us with her ageless enthusiasm and the magic she creates during our programs. Recognizing HERO's ongoing impact, the USTA, Eastern Section awarded Janet its "Woman of the Year" for 2022. We see it as our mission to continue this fine work. HERO's programs are largely free to its participants. The limited fees from the organizations that serve our participants are not enough to fund our programs. We are funded by grants and private donors. I invite you and yours to help us continue this life-transforming work. Help us provide the kinds of experiences Gregory, our 19-year-old volunteer meant when he said, "Mom, these kids are just like me!"

80% of all monies donated to HERO directly support our programming. We are lean and mean but we NEED your support to keep going. Please join me in helping HERO help others by filling out the form below today and mailing in your check. Consider volunteering as well! Your dollars and your time will allow us to continue to change lives.

Sincerely,

Jerry Weil, President HERO Board of Directors

JANET LEFKOWITZ

RECEIVES 2022 WOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD FROM USTA, EASTERN

USTA, Eastern Section awarded Janet Lefkowitz, HERO Co-Founder and Tennis Director for the Town of Greenburgh its "Woman of the Year" Award for 2022. USTA, Eastern honors those who have made remarkable contributions toward growing and promoting tennis at the grassroots level.



"Tennis Woman of the Year" is awarded to a woman in recognition of her outstanding volunteer efforts and service to tennis in the USTA, Eastern Section. USTA, Eastern Section includes the State of New York, Northern New Jersey and a small piece of southern Connecticut.

VOLUNTEERING FOR HERO BY ROBIN PASTERNAK

I have had the utmost privilege of volunteering alongside Janet Lefkowitz, at HERO. This not-for-profit was launched 30 years ago, using adapted tennis as its main vehicle. We work with Ability Beyond, an organization that serves adults living with traumatic brain injury and developmental disabilities.

Our weekly program, is held at the Saw Mill Club, Mt. Kisco, NY. Our team of volunteers encourage our participants to do warm-ups, stretches and drills. In smaller groups, broken down by ability, many even have the opportunity to play a game or two, which is always met with cheers and laughter by all those in attendance. Our participants who range in age from 20-60 years young, leave each week with a greater sense of admiration for those who touched me so personally.



Robyn Pasternak joined HERO in 2019 where she has been able to foster her love and passion for tennis volunteering to play tennis and assist those with development disabilities. Robyn also works as a team facilitator at Wagon Road, which is run by the Children's Aid Society, one of NY's largest social service agencies. At Wagon Road, Robyn works with a diverse group of children helping them to partake in a day of challenges and exciting recreational programs. She also facilitates in advertising in their companies' team-building programs. In 2009, Robyn launched Gear It Up, a custom screen printing business out of the need to give her school district a more efficient and economical way to fundraise.

HERO'S HEROES

ASSEMBLYMAN TOM ABINANTI

Assemblyman Tom Abinanti has been a "voice for the voiceless" for many years. He was the chair of the the NY State Committee for the Disabled. He urged the state to increase funding for housing and programs that benefit adults and children living with disabilities. He has also proposed training and certification for individuals working in group homes and day treatment centers. Since 1992, Tom has been a steadfast supporter of the HERO mission. He is quite simply the very definition of a HERO'S HERO.



MARK CANO

Mark is the facilities manager at Greenburgh Indoor Tennis. In 2021, he arranged for HERO'S MS Tennis Class to use the Greenburgh courts on 3 separate occasions. The women loved the experience. Mark was a gracious host, providing water and making sure everything was going well. We are grateful for his generosity. He surely is a HERO'S HERO.

30 YEARS OF HERO HIGHLIGHTS

- Adapted Karate - special belts
- Adapted Tennis
- 25 years of James E. Allen Elementary and JR., Sr. High School Carnivals
- Over 20 years of participating agencies Ability Beyond (formerly DATHAR)
- David Osterer Center, MS Tennis, Bellrose Center for Progress, Lois Bronz

SPECIAL INITIATIVES

- Head Start Centers, 20 Special Schools Westchester and Long Island
- The Center for Discovery Residential School for youth and adolescents with profound challenges including blindness and paralysis

FROM STUDENT TO TEACHER

My son Gergory, now 19, is a very active person. At a young age he expressed interest in sports. After joining our town pool and meeting wonderful people there, we found out about a tennis program for special needs children run by HERO. Gergory was 5 years old when he started and enjoyed every minute of it. He is a child with ADHD and movement is so important for him. He kept focus on tennis while moving his body for the entire session. Janet Lefkowitz has a way of egaging all children in the group and keeps all levels involved in play. Gregory developed a love of tennis beyond his own activity. He would hit balls against our garage door (!) and got his younger brother to join in with his enthusiasm for the sport. We attended Arthur Ashe Kids Day at the National Tennis Center and watched matches on TV every year. While attending middle and high school, out of disctrict, Gergory was craving a connection to the community. He asked Janet if he could volunteer to help kids in the special needs tennis group. I don't think he knew at that moment how much he would get back from the kids. The first day he volunteered, he said, "Mom, these kids, they are like me." It is a gift to help others and in turn, help yourself!

Now at the end of his freshman year of college, he is set to work this summer at Tennis Camp, at the same park where we first learned to love the game. He worked there last year as an assistant counselor and had a great experience. He enjoyed the camaraderie of the counselors, the skills of the campers and being outside with everyone. He is very observant and helped a fainting child in the heat. He received such positive feedback about his work and gained confidence in his skills, as he had not had a job perviously. He said, "it's amazing" to work with everyone at HERO and Greenburgh Recreation.

I am thankful that this opportunity exists in our community! And I am grateful to have met Janet Lefkowitz.

Jo Ann Weinig, Gregory's Mom



Please cut below and mail to HERO, Inc. P.O. Box733 Ardsley, NY 10502

ENCLOSED PLEASE FIND MY TAX- DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTION TO HERO, INC FOR:

☐\$25 ☐\$50 ☐\$100 ☐\$250 ☐\$500 ☐\$1000 ☐Other Designation ☐Highest Need

☐I would like to fund a program

☐I am interested in Volunteering

Name_____

Address_____City_____State_____Zip_____

Email_____Phone_____