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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**ECLC of New Jersey Special-Needs School**

**Commemorates 25 Years in Chatham!**

**CHATHAM** – When ECLC of New Jersey took over a vacant middle school in Chatham 25 years ago, the organization didn't see a rundown, former schoolhouse. Instead, like newlyweds buying their first home, they dreamed of an opportunity to turn the aged building into a place they could call home for their students with special needs.

After settling into the school, ECLC launched a capital campaign to renovate dilapidated classrooms; add an arts studio, a model apartment, a teaching kitchen and an elevator; and repair the aging boiler and a leaky roof.

The building needed extensive repairs; however, the relationship with the local community was on a firm foundation right from the start. Everyone from shop owners to local organizations, such as the Kiwanis Club and the Chamber of Commerce, embraced ECLC and its mission. ECLC uses downtown Chatham – and nearby towns -- as an extension of the classroom, where students learn social skills and activities of daily living that will help them integrate into society in the years to come.

On Sept. 27, members of the community showed up to support ECLC, as it celebrated 25 years in the borough with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on school's front lawn.

During the event, Mayor Bruce Harris said, "You are a superior educational institution in this town. ECLC serves an important niche for children who otherwise might not be well-served by our educational system. It continues the tradition in Chatham Borough of focusing on quality education."

In turn, Principal Diane Gagliardi thanked all of the shop owners for “being so patient with our children,” and acknowledged borough officials for their support, singling out Recreation Deputy Director Carol Nauta for providing field access to the students for many years.

She then invited Harris and other officials, including State Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz (R-District 21), Police Chief Philip Crosson, Lt Brian Gibbons and

### **About ECLC**

Established in 1970, ECLC of New Jersey offers lifelong services -- education, enrichment and employment -- to children and adults with special needs, including those diagnosed with autism, Down syndrome and severe learning and/or language disabilities. ECLC has schools in Chatham and Ho-Ho-Kus enrolling more than 300 students.

As students prepare to graduate, transition specialists from ECLC’s affiliate Community Personnel Services (CPS), take over, guiding them into the next chapter of their lives. CPS specialists help students find meaningful jobs in their communities and provide ongoing support and advocacy in the workplace.

Graduates who are not ready for work are guaranteed a spot in the P.R.I.D.E. program, where they enhance their independent living skills, socialize with peers and volunteer. A defining hallmark of P.R.I.D.E. is that clients choose their activities and are rarely in the center all day. Learn more about ECLC at [www.eclcofnj.org](http://www.eclcofnj.org).

ECLC is a member of the Alliance of Private Special Education Schools of North Jersey, a coalition of more than 30 state-approved private special education schools dedicated to helping parents and educators better understand and access appropriate program options. Learn more about the Alliance at <http://specialeducationalliancenj.org>.