



**Amalia Duarte, Public Affairs Director**

ECLC of NJ

Cell: (973-902-8390)

E-mail: [aduarte@eclcofnj.org](mailto:aduarte@eclcofnj.org)

## **IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **ECLC of New Jersey Opens the**

#### **Morris P.R.I.D.E. Center for Adults with Special Needs and Thanks Supporters**

**FLORHAM PARK** – On Oct. 1, ECLC of New Jersey officially opened the Morris P.R.I.D.E. Center for adults with special needs, including autism, Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities and recognized major donors who made the new center possible through their generosity.

The P.R.I.D.E. Center opened following a \$450,000 capital campaign to transform a drab warehouse space into a cheery, bright center with activity rooms, a teaching kitchen, a model apartment, and a technology center. The center also includes a dedicated work area where adult clients earn a paycheck by completing contracted work, such as shredding and packaging, for local businesses.

A former ECLC staff member, Toby Cooperman, and her husband, Leon, of Short Hills, were instrumental in the campaign's success. They donated a \$125,000 challenge matching grant, which inspired others to give. This infusion of funds allowed ECLC to finish the campaign in a short six months. For 25 years, Toby Cooperman was a Learning Disability Teacher/Consultant (LDTC) at ECLC's school in Chatham for children with special needs. During her tenure, she quietly donated behind the scenes, but shied away from any sort of recognition. Since retiring in June 2013, she has gone public about her support and joined the ECLC Board of Trustees to support the nonprofit organization.

While the Coopermans led the charge, a group of other major donors, longtime ECLC supporters and inspirational people were honored yesterday for their invaluable contributions: the late Robin Sims, Bebe Antell of West Orange, Carol and Steve Lampf of Chatham, Richard and Katherine Gatward of Summit, Judy and Billy Greenblatt of Short Hills, Howard and Debby Kaminsky of Short Hills and Richard and Robin Pzena of Short Hills.

The grand opening also highlighted October's "National Disability Employment Awareness Month," which recognizes the contributions of workers with disabilities. The theme for 2014 is "Expect. Employ. Empower." With a nod to these three goals, P.R.I.D.E. Director, Dot Libman, said, "With this new center,

we are truly able to fulfill what our acronym stands for: Promoting Responsibility, Independence, Decision-making and Employability. At P.R.I.D.E., we always look to empower our clients and look to support their capabilities and nurture their strengths.”

ECLC welcomed elected officials, including Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, for the milestone event. In her remarks, Guadagno applauded ECLC and said she came to the event because she wanted to “see happy people, getting what they need.” She said that after visiting 32 facilities like P.R.I.D.E what she has learned is, “The biggest pain, the biggest nightmare of a parent isn't that these facilities exist, it's that there aren't enough of them. What will happen to my child when he ages out? What will happen to my child when I die? Those are the issues, and you're dealing with them right here.”

State Senator and former Governor Richard Codey, Morris County Freeholder Deputy Director David Scapicchio, Morris County Freeholder Kathryn DeFillippo and Florham Park Mayor Mark Taylor all joined in the celebration and helped cut the ribbon.

The P.R.I.D.E. program started six years ago for graduates of ECLC's special-needs schools in Chatham and Ho-Ho-Kus. While the schools place a strong emphasis on transitioning from school to work, for some students, the workplace is not an option. Some ECLC graduates were struggling, languishing at home, isolated from their peers and the community. P.R.I.D.E. was launched to help those young adults continue growing and enhancing their independent living skills.

Right from the beginning P.R.I.D.E. was a success and quickly outgrew its original space in a former light industrial building in Florham Park. With this new expanded center, the P.R.I.D.E. program has a place in Morris County to call home for many years to come.

“ECLC is excited to officially open our Morris P.R.I.D.E. Center to serve adult clients as an extension of our schools for students with special needs. And, we are grateful to our donors, who made it all possible by contributing the entire cost of this \$450,000 project,” said ECLC Executive Director, Bruce Litinger. “P.R.I.D.E. is a dream come true to offer a program that is intellectually stimulating, community-based, pre-vocational, safe and, yes, enjoyable. We hold fast to the belief that people with developmental disabilities continue to grow and progress after their age 21 entitlement schooling is completed, and we have witnessed that amazing growth in our clients.”

## **About ECLC**

Established in 1970, ECLC of New Jersey is an accredited, nonprofit offering lifelong services -- education, enrichment and employment opportunities -- to children and adults with special needs, including those diagnosed with autism, Down syndrome and severe learning and/or language disabilities. Learn more about ECLC at [www.eclcofnj.org](http://www.eclcofnj.org).