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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Liberty ARC Honors Community Collaborations at Annual Meeting

Amsterdam – Liberty ARC held their Annual Meeting this month at Glen Sanders Mansion in Scotia. At the event, this year’s winners of the agency’s community-based awards were recognized for their outstanding commitment to people with disabilities and making the area a better place for all to live. The Fort Hunter Fire Department was the recipient of the 2024 Community Partner Award, and Liberty ARC’s Canajoharie Trunk or Treat received the Community Commitment award.

Every year, Liberty ARC staff and the people supported by the agency plan and hold a Trunk or Treat event in Canajoharie, bringing the community together to celebrate Halloween. In 2023, 500 participants attended. Liberty ARC staff, the people we support, and community members all decorate their cars to hand out candy or trick or treat themselves with the children. The event was created initially for people of all ages and abilities to come together in a fun, inclusive, and comfortable setting to celebrate Halloween. Staff received feedback from parents with children who are uncomfortable in new surroundings that they were the most engaged and had so much fun at the agency’s event compared to other Trunk or Treats they participated in in the area.

“Trunk or Treat is a wonderful opportunity for Liberty ARC and the community to come together, making valuable connections and creating meaningful relationships at such a fun event,” said Candace Opalka, Liberty ARC’s Chief Operating Officer. “This year the group was recognized because of the difference they made for families in the community. We also received feedback from parents regarding the warm and welcoming spirit of the night that made it a relaxing atmosphere for their children. Staff and the people we support put a lot of planning and hard work in holding this yearly event that is such a success and continues to grow in popularity.”

“The appreciation from receiving this award is paramount,” said Tammy Honeywell, a Senior Habilitation Coordinator at Liberty ARC, who takes part in the Trunk or Treat event. “We strive to offer activities to the community that are meaningful and fun. This event captures both as it is well received by the community. To be recognized for our efforts makes us feel proud. This event offers us the opportunity to give back to the community in a fun way that is appreciated by both children and adults. To offer a space for children to partake in Halloween activities and really enjoy their time, as well as providing the comfort of a safe place to do so, is appreciated by the adults. The people and staff love working closely with the community especially for the children and seeing the excitement this event brings to them.”

The Fort Hunter Fire Department warmly welcomes people of all ages and abilities to participate with the department at whatever level that they desire to or are able to. Ryan Howell, who receives services through Liberty ARC, is an active member of the department. He has been involved with several other fire departments in Montgomery County in the past, but his time with Fort Hunter has been his favorite. He is involved in drills, meetings, and trainings and has all the proper gear to do the job. The Fort Hunter Fire Department also has a group from day program that volunteers to regularly clean the station. This group is interested in the fire department, and their desired level of involvement is fulfilled. The Fort Hunter Fire Department also volunteers their time by visiting Liberty ARC to discuss fire safety education and provide the opportunity for the people supported to check out the fire trucks and talk with the members.

“Every year, Liberty ARC’s Community Partner Award is given to a deserving community organization or individual that has shown outstanding support and commitment to people with disabilities in Liberty ARC’s programs. With the multiple levels of inclusion and opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the Fort Hunter Fire Department is very deserving of this award,” said Liberty ARC CEO Jennifer Saunders.

“On behalf of the Fort Hunter Fire Department, I would like to express how grateful we are to receive this award. It is always our mission to provide an inclusive environment at the station and throughout our community,” said Nate Bedell, Chief of the Fire Department. “Ryan with his passion for helping and working with others as team has been a wonderful addition to the fire house. It is our pleasure to open our doors to the people at Liberty ARC and to visit to ensure all feel welcome and understand the importance of fire safety.”

Liberty ARC also recognized their Employees of the Year during the meeting. The following outstanding employees were honored:

Program Employee of the Year – Keisha Carter, Family Support Services Direct Support Professional

Support Employee of the Year – Anthony Bianchine, Safety Manager

Manager of the Year – Dayton Blanc, Regional Scheduling Coordinator

Director of the Year – Carrie-Ann Schmidt, Director of Operations

James H. and Barbara H. Schliff Award – Colleen Verhayden, Senior Program Coordinator

Special recognition was given to eight people who receive supports and services from Liberty ARC for being with the agency for 35, 45, and 55 years.

The following board members were honored for their milestone years of service: Sarah Adamowski O'Connor for five years of service to the Liberty Foundation Board of Directors, Michele Downing for five years serving on the New Dimensions in Living Board of Directors, and Donna Canestraro for 10 years of service to the Liberty Foundation Board of Directors.

Sworn in as Liberty ARC Board officers for the 2024-2024 term were: Kim Brumley, president; Deborah Slezak, vice president; Carl Pucci, secretary; Michael Bucciferro, treasurer. The following directors were sworn in for the 2024-2026 term: Ken Adamowski, Arthur Breault, Donna Canestraro, Paul DiCaprio, Holly Gray, Brett Harris, Carl Pucci, Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal, Brandon Waylett, and Sarah Wilson-Sparrow.

About Liberty ARC

Liberty ARC, the Montgomery County Chapter of The Arc New York, is a not-for-profit agency that provides top-quality supports and services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Montgomery and Schenectady Counties. We are proud of our six decades of bringing these innovative and valuable programs to those most vulnerable in our community. While staying committed to our framework the agency has grown our employment, residential, day supports, family support and health-related programming throughout the years. Our mission- *Together we support people with disabilities to achieve a quality of life each person values* - together with our *Values* make up the foundation on which our culture is framed. We are extremely proud to be a pioneering agency, which coupled with a dynamic workforce and our person-centered mission makes Liberty ARC a stand-out in our field.

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