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For Immediate Release

Disability Rights Advocates, Others Honored by Stavros

Northampton residents Oyrx Cohen, Will Hall, and Michael Nagy recently received awards from Stavros Center for Independent Living for their work as advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities. All three men received *Ted Martineau Awards* at the annual *access awards* of Stavros Center for Independent Living at an October 20th luncheon at Chateau Provost in Chicopee. The awards, named after the long-time President of Stavros, are given annually to individuals with disabilities who demonstrate exemplary commitment to the rights of the disability community.

“Oyrx Cohen and Will Hall have done remarkable work with the Freedom Center in Northampton,” said Janet Shaw, Director of Independent Living Services at Stavros. “Their commitment to self-determination for persons with disabilities is inspiring for all of us, and the work of everyone at the Freedom Center is achieving well-deserved national recognition,” Shaw continued.

“Michael Nagy has been a very effective advocate for access and disability rights in the city of Northampton,” Ms. Shaw said, citing his work with the Northampton Council on Disability. “Mike knows all too well that big changes don’t occur overnight, but he has kept battling to achieve the kinds of differences that will make this community accessible to all.”

Several area businesses and institutions received *Paul Winske Awards* for accessibility as well. The *A to Z Science Store* on King Street was cited for its basic access, the ease with which customers with disabilities can navigate the store, and the awning that offered shelter from the elements for persons using the “handicapped” parking space at the front. The *Old Elks Lodge* building on Center Street was honored as well. “The owners took your basic, old, inaccessible building and turned it into a structure that’s friendly to any potential user,” Ms. Shaw said. *St. Mary’s Church* on Elm Street was also recognized. “Accessible features such as the entrance ramp and the rest room are really well-integrated into the church; access here isn’t just an afterthought,” said Shaw. “We were also impressed by the presence of assistive listening devices.”

West Hatfield had a winner too, as *Holy Smokes Barbeque and Whole Hog House* took an award. “When you think about a restaurant in an old New England church, you don’t imagine you’ll find accessibility,” Ms. Shaw said. “But Holy Smokes has put in a lift as an alternative to steep entrance steps, and there are accessible tables and rest rooms as well.”

Stavros presents awards annually to individuals, businesses, and organizations that have done exceptional work in creating access for persons with disabilities. Nominations come from the more than 5,000 individuals Stavros serves each year throughout the Pioneer Valley. Stavros is a member agency of the United Way of Hampshire County.

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