

ACADEMY WORKS

Driving up employment for people with disabilities, including Veterans

“ENDOW A CHAIR” CAMPAIGN A SUCCESS!

Thanks to all of our supporters who contributed to our “Endow a Chair” campaign we now have 60 new chairs in place! Special thanks goes out to manufacturer, **ERGOCENTRIC SEATING SYSTEMS** and Academy friend **Lou Pitonyak, LJP ERGONOMICS/ERGO PROFESSIONALS**, for *amplifying* our budget with a very generous in-kind contribution! Combining their in-kind generosity has allowed us to purchase \$24,000 worth of professional quality, fully adjustable seating to enhance the learning environment of The Academy! Board member, **Jeff Horner**, and the Academy Student council were instrumental in leading this “Endow a Chair” fundraising effort. Current and past students are thrilled with the ‘upgrades’ stating, “A comfortable learning environment can make all of the difference – thank you to all who contributed to this campaign.” Heidi George, now employed at the University of Pennsylvania says, “Thank you for your generosity – each new chair will support over 10,000 hours of education in the next five years.”



Major Donors include: Jeff Horner, Chief Development Officer, UCB, Inc.; Lou Pitonyak, LJP Ergonomics Professionals and Ergocentric Seating Systems.

Public Private Partnerships at Work!

by *Emily Coder, Outreach Coordinator (215) 634-2000 ext. 258*



The Academy welcomes our new OVR liaison **Dave Bautista**! L to R: **Derrick Mason; Angela Brown; James Piergalline (OVR); Khyriyyah Abdus-Samad; Dave Bautista (OVR)**, and **Janet Fiore (Academy)**

Many say that change is the only constant and this year, for The Academy, was no exception. With the help of **Wayne Trout**, the District Administrator of the **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (Philadelphia)**, we finalized the paperwork process that completed the transfer of the program to **The Sierra Group Foundation**. Wayne and his management team, including **Sharon Silverman**, were also instrumental in the effort to find our program a new on-site liaison to work with all of the students. **Dave Bautista**, CRC (OVR-Philadelphia) supported

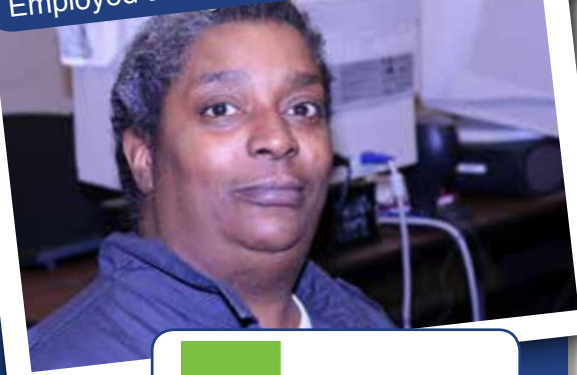
by **James Piergalline (OVR-Philadelphia)** have stepped into active roles with the students and they have already become welcome friends to many of us during their routine visits. Thank you Wayne, Sharon, Dave and the Philadelphia OVR Team for all of your hard work!

The Academy will build on that work by continuing to update our technology tools and curriculum to provide even more competitive marketplace training to our students.



Janet Fiore, CEO of The Sierra Group making headline news for Disability & Employment!

HELEN E. NEWSOME
Employed as 1st year Tax Professional



H&R BLOCK®

Counting On Helen Newsome To Succeed

All of the practice, all of the training, and all of the grueling mock interview preparation paid off for **Helen Newsome** last month as she secured a permanent position with **H&R Block** as an Account Specialist. Remembering the start of her classes in early 2011 Helen recalls, "I've learned a lot and while it's been tough, it's been fun too— after so many years out of work, it was fun to see how much I could learn."

As part of her Academy training Helen completed a variety of "Yes I Can" projects, as well as an internal and external internship. Her external Internship was hosted by the Financial Management Services Department of **Liberty Resources, Inc.** "The internship component is critical to our teaching process – we let students try their new skills out in environments that mirror their ultimate work goals. This helps us find new ways to help students like Helen succeed," says Emily Coder, Outreach Coordinator. Way to go Helen!

Spotlight on Damar Creighton, Instructor

Damar Creighton, the newest member of our professional team is enhancing classes and student experiences with his background in both Education and Information Systems from **Drexel University**. Damar's teaching experience and his enthusiasm for bringing in new online tools to augment classroom training is exciting for the students and staff. **Paul Iaconelli**, a current student says, "Damar cares about me and makes me feel that I can 'get it' when he teaches. That helps me a lot."



Students Welcome New Instructor: Paul Iaconelli, Damar Creighton and Audrey Spencer

The #1 Rule of Success: Celebration Matters

In December the Academy students, their families and the entire staff of The Sierra Group came together to celebrate the season! More than 200 people enjoyed food, music, and gifts for the children from Santa.



Academy Friends and Family Enjoying the Season!

Having trouble seeing the computer screen?

ZoomText can help!



"I test, edit, and publish online knowledge base articles for a software company. I never would have been able to succeed in this role without ZoomText."

--Grace Strother

Learn more: www.aisquared.com/sierra

“Team Academy” – Got Blisters? Proof That Hard Work Pays Off

by *Michael G. Fiore*

We raised over \$10,000 from our runners, sponsors and supporters in the 2012 Philadelphia Marathon.

“As **Seth Acosta** (The Sierra Group) and I set up our hospitality station for our runners, we recognized that we were in the presence of a group of disciplined individuals. As the runners were preparing for their full or half marathon, we were tired just from the walk to our tent from the car! Undeterred, we yelled and cheered, offered water, posed for photos and did all of this with thankful hearts as hundreds of hours of preparation and effort allowed thousands of dollars to be raised for our job-seekers with disabilities.”

—Michael G. Fiore



Thank you to our runners:

Chris Adomat, Nick Allin, Michelle Barone, James Bencrowski, Anthony Berry, Will Chapman, Antoine Gist, Eric Kaag, Seth Matarasso, Janna McGruddy, Kurt Podlogar, Erin Schied, Jon Schwartz, Sara Shugars, Jay Tarbell, Aviva Tobin-Hess, Robert Tucker and Arjani Zubin



Academy student Brandy Jones with Seth Acosta & some of our runners!



Seth Acosta with Mazda Miles



Jay Tarbell



Nick Allin



James Bencrowsky

Team Academy would also like to thank our corporate sponsors: TD Bank, Coastal Properties, Reese Management, Olive Garden and RecruitDisability.org.

Remembering a Champion: Jack Dankanich



Marie Pallidino (Assistant Director of The Academy) and her friend **Jack Dankanich** (OVR-Philadelphia) look on as students present in their Basic Business Communication class.

The Academy's friend and first OVR Liaison, **Jack Dankanich** was remembered at a memorial service on October 16, 2012 at the **Old First Reformed United Church of Christ** in Philadelphia. From the very first day of Academy classes back in 2001, Jack Dankanich of OVR was a key component to the 'heart' of the program. Having worked with hundreds of students, the routine meetings where Jack dispensed wisdom, encouragement, and good humor became known as "*The Jack Meetings*." Since his retirement and passing, we still honor his memory and good stewardship by referring to our student meetings as *The Jack Meetings*. **Marie Palladino** offers, "He was a warm and wonderful man who believed in second chances and the power of possibility—he believed in people! I will miss him very much."

The Academy is naming one of our learning labs "**The Jack Dankanich Yes I Can Room**," where we will hang a memorial plaque that was graciously provided by **Mr. Wayne Trout, D.A.**, Philadelphia Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).

Help us Help Others

Money can't buy experience, but your donation could help us support our Internship Program.

- Become an Internship Host!
- Designate The Sierra Group Foundation through the United Way.
- Make a donation today!