

# Think**DIFFERENTLY.**



By thinking differently, we can change the way we as individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities relate to everyone of every ability.

[THINKDIFFERENTLY.NET](http://THINKDIFFERENTLY.NET)





# THINK AHEAD

In 2017, we collaborated with Dutchess Community College (DCC), Maplebrook School, Abilities First Inc., Arc of the Greater Hudson Valley and Taconic Resources for Independence to create the Think Ahead program at DCC. Think Ahead is a college experience program that focuses on job readiness and skill development for qualified students. In 2018, this well received program expanded to include a summer component to further prepare rising second year students with an individualized focus for each students' professional growth and readiness. The 2020 pandemic did not slow this program down, it moved to a successful virtual model and as time progressed into a hybrid model course delivery. Think Ahead has a growing list of internship opportunities for these students, including interning with Dutchess County Government, the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce, and many local businesses.

20  
current

27  
graduated

*"Think Ahead is an ambitious, unique and worthwhile program that has made an enormous difference in Andrew's life..."*

- The mother of a Think Ahead student







# OUR CHALLENGE TO THINK DIFFERENTLY

Marcus J. Molinaro  
Dutchess County Executive

Our call to action has been embraced throughout Dutchess County, New York State and across the nation. More and more people from all walks of life are choosing to focus on the inherent potential of every individual, regardless of ability. With our ThinkDIFFERENTLY.net website, residents have a resource like no other, offering simple navigation through the comprehensive array of services available – connecting families to resources, events, information, and each other.

We are inspired when we see the real impact of ThinkDIFFERENTLY. We hear it in the voices of those too often overlooked, and we see it in the growing number of people willing to open their hearts and minds to neighbors of all abilities. Yet there is more that can be done to break down barriers; we each need to challenge ourselves to ThinkDIFFERENTLY and create new opportunities. Join this effort by hosting your own ThinkDIFFERENTLY event and let us know! I challenge business owners and employers to support the Think Jobs initiative and partner with us to create employment opportunities in your business for someone with a different ability.

Let's all find a way to ThinkDIFFERENTLY and in doing so, continue to make Dutchess County and beyond more inclusive and accessible for everyone.



DUTCHESSNY.GOV

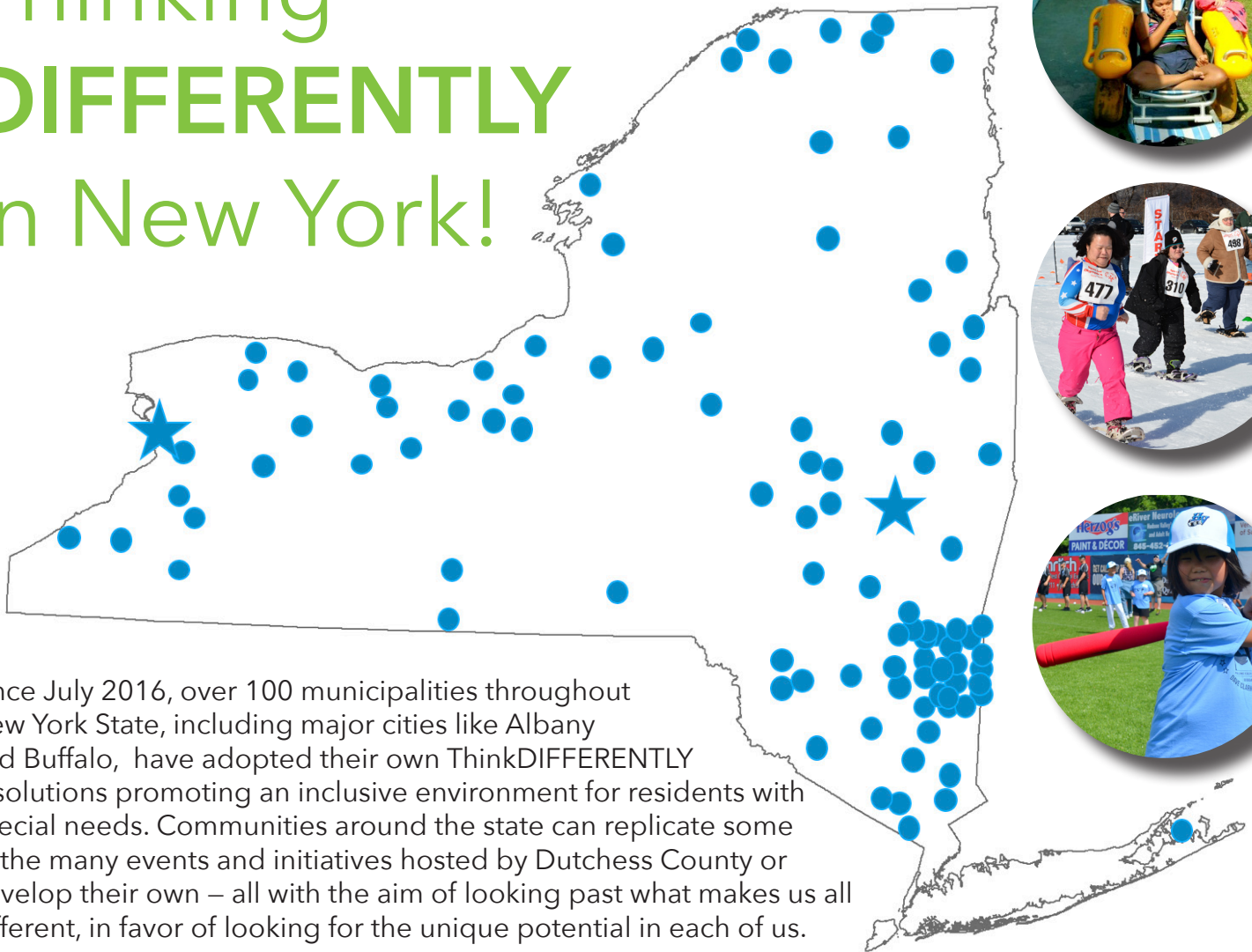
THINKDIFFERENTLY.NET

2021 marks the 5th year of Think Jobs in Dutchess County. Through a partnership with Dutchess County Government, the Dutchess County Workforce Investment Board has held Mini Round Table discussions quarterly and an Annual Round Table event with local businesses both in person at the FDR Home and Library and virtually through Zoom. These discussions bring area businesses, educators and leaders in vocational training together to discuss how to best prepare people of all abilities for the job market as well as the importance and benefits of hiring residents with disabilities. The Think Jobs committee serves as a single point of entry for employers to share job opportunities which are collected and emailed weekly to agencies working with individuals of all abilities.

## THINK JOBS



# Thinking **DIFFERENTLY** in New York!



Since July 2016, over 100 municipalities throughout New York State, including major cities like Albany and Buffalo, have adopted their own ThinkDIFFERENTLY resolutions promoting an inclusive environment for residents with special needs. Communities around the state can replicate some of the many events and initiatives hosted by Dutchess County or develop their own – all with the aim of looking past what makes us all different, in favor of looking for the unique potential in each of us.

## LET'S GET MOVING Tackling Transportation Challenges Collaboratively

We continue to find new ways to assess, inform, and shape transportation systems. The guiding mission of public transit is informed by the importance of and impact that accessible transportation has on a person's quality of life, by preserving independence. Dutchess County's Universal Transportation Accessibility Task Force works with residents and community service providers to address transportation needs and challenges for people of all abilities. Recent transit studies conducted by the Division of Public Transit will lead to several new ADA accessible bus shelters and more convenient bus stops. Community outreach meetings are a mainstay of our planning, evaluation, and implementation of our transit plans. These open forum meetings further discussion and focuses on the needs of those challenged with daily transportation. We are committed to identifying partners who will find new solutions, improve customer service, and support alternatives to help individuals travel to employment, job training, education, and activities to support the quality of life we all enjoy. Through creative solutions and new collaborations, the availability of transportation can enhance community connections while reducing barriers to employment and services.

Dutchess County has completed a new long-range transportation plan, Moving Dutchess Forward, that will serve as its strategic vision for improving transportation in the county through 2045. The new plan focuses on how the transportation system enables or prevents people from participating in the basics of life (living, working, learning, etc.), and recommends the planning policies and transformative investments needed to improve safety, reliability, and access to basic needs.



## BARDAVON 1869 OPERA HOUSE

In collaboration with the New Paltz Ballet Theatre hosted a live, sensory sensitive performance of the Nutcracker in 2019! This event was tremendously successful and we are hopeful to bring more live sensory sensitive performance to the Bardavon in coming years!

# 16

## RED CARPET MOVIE DAYS

People of all abilities, their families, and care providers can attend sensory-friendly movie days hosted by Dutchess County. Theaters adjust both lighting and sound to make the experience more enjoyable for those living with sensory issues. Sponsorship from local business and agencies made through the ThinkDIFFERENTLY Foundation make this event possible.

## 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL THINK DIFFERENTLY PICNIC

Launched in 2013 by County Executive Marc Molianro, this annual event featured several themes to engage and delight those of every ability, their families and care providers each year.

[thinkdifferently.net](http://thinkdifferently.net)

The Dutchess County Fair continues to open its gates early to offer an opportunity for people of all abilities to enjoy all the fair has to offer including two hours of sensory sensitive time at the rides and games. With the lights and music turned off people who are sensory sensitive can enjoy these features of the Fair. In 2021, ThinkDIFFERENTLY has partnered with Dutchess County Parks and Cornell Cooperative Extension's 4 H program to be at the Fair all week!

# 5<sup>TH</sup>

## ANNUAL THINKDIFFERENTLY THURSDAY AT THE FAIR

[dutchessfair.com](http://dutchessfair.com)

## 4<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL COLLABORATION OF SERVICES CONFERENCE HOSTED BY DUTCHESS COUNTY:

Brings together families, agencies and advocates to learn how to navigate the systems of care.

# 60

## LOCAL BUSINESSES

Have recieved Supportive Environment Training through the Anderson Center for Autism (both in person and virtually). This individualized training enhances customer service and provides creative approaches that can help make businesses more welcoming for those of all abilities.

[andersoncenterforautism.org](http://andersoncenterforautism.org)

## OVER 400 FIRST RESPONDERS TRAINED

Training for Firefighters, Law Enforcement, and Emergency Room staff is focused on identifying the characteristics and behavior of a person living on the autism spectrum and other individuals with sensory issues; how to communicate with and assist them in an emergency situation. In 2019, the county added another specialized training for families and individuals who are diagnosed with Autism with the goal of providing families the opportunity to learn how to help their family members with Autism if or when it comes to having an interaction with a First Responders.

# 1 MILE

## THINKDIFFERENTLY DASH

Dutchess County in partnership with Dutchess Tourism and City of Poughkeepsie First Friday host a 1 mile run/walk in the City of Poughkeepsie for participants of all abilities. This event is fully inclusive and open to anyone of any ability to come out, participate in the Dash and enjoy the festivities of the event.

# Creating Universal & Accessible Parks

Dutchess County is committed to further develop a culture which promotes universal accessible parks, programs, and social experiences for residents and visitors of all abilities. Within the next three to five years, Dutchess County Parks will expand some of their facilities to include a new fully accessible playground (Bowdoin Park), construct an all-inclusive splashpad (Wilcox Memorial Park), increase accessible parking and programs (Quiet Cove Riverfront Park), and develop the counties' newest park at Lake Walton Preserve. The preserve, which is located off the WRS Dutchess Rail Trail, will have a fully accessible 1.4-mile loop as well as other inclusive opportunities such as fishing, bird watching, and exploring nature through sensory features. Dutchess Stadium, home of the Hudson Valley Renegades, a Class A Affiliate of the New York Yankees, will also undergo some upgrades to meet current Major League Baseball accessibility standards. Along with these facility upgrades, park staff continues to develop and add new adaptive naturalist programs, collaborative workshops, and online learning opportunities for all to enjoy.

Additional examples include the Wappinger Challenger Field, a baseball field for developmentally or physically disabled children; and Julie's Jungle, an adaptive playground for all ability levels. The ThinkDIFFERENTLY spirit also inspired projects such as Arlington High School students creating universally accessible playground equipment at Tymor Park in LaGrange. Freedom Park in LaGrange has a sensory garden and seeking to construct an accessible fishing dock for residents to enjoy. East Fishkill's Red Wing Park offers beach mats for easy access to and from the water, a floating beach wheelchair, and aquatic assistant swimming devices.

To learn more about Dutchess County Parks and to view the full Parks and Recreation Master Plan visit [DutchessNY.gov/Parks](http://DutchessNY.gov/Parks).



## BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



To assist in making public facilities more accessible, Dutchess County offers small capital grants to communities through our Municipal Innovation Grant Program to fund ADA improvements. Something as simple as adding a ramp or wheelchair lift to a building, ADA accessible restroom facilities, audio loop for public meetings, or accessible parking can break down barriers, making a world of difference.



## DISABILITY, DREAM & DO AT DUTCHESS STADIUM

Dutchess County sponsored and hosted the three annual Disability, Dream & Do Baseball Weekends at Dutchess Stadium. The camp is a collaboration between Dutchess County, the Hudson Valley Renegades, and the Dave Clark Foundation and is free for local children and young adults of all abilities. Participants learn from professional players and coaches in a great minor-league ballpark and receive a free camp T-shirt and complimentary tickets to a Renegades game at Dutchess Stadium.



# Special Olympics in Dutchess County

Dutchess County was fortunate enough to host the Special Olympics New York State Summer Games in 2019, building on the tremendous success of the Winter Games hosted here in 2016 and 2017. These events attract thousands of athletes and coaches from around the State to compete at sports venues throughout our County. The games provide a special opportunity for the community to come together to celebrate, cheer, and be inspired by these athletes and their stories. We were slated to host the 2020 games but they were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are looking to the future and hope to host them again in the future!



**Special  
Olympics**  
New York





# THINKDIFFERENTLY.NET

Your One-Stop Guide to Services, Events & More!

## Who

Who are you seeking services for?

## What

What type of services are you looking for?

## Where

Where are you seeking services?

ThinkDIFFERENTLY.net offers simple navigation through the comprehensive array of local services available to residents of all abilities, their families, and service providers. The site connects people to resources and community events, offering information to assist with planning for the future.

Our website is the winner of the Center for Digital Government 2018 Government Experience Award, that recognizes county government's commitment to providing information to citizen through an innovative digital experience.



Find local service providers or programs, based on an individual's specific age, diagnosis, and location.



Learn about child development milestones and how to plan for the future and continuity of supports as they move through life.



Easily connect to local, state and national resources for information about developmental and other disability diagnoses.



Learn how communities can "ThinkDIFFERENTLY" - by taking part in an inclusive event, partnering with local organizations or funding accessible infrastructure projects.



### DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

Toni-Marie Ciarfella, Ph.D. serves as a facilitator and advocate for individuals and families with special needs.

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