

LOCAL NEWS

The Arc Mercer set to host Gala Event to celebrate achievements



(Submitted photo)

By **A.Z. JOHNSON** | Ajohnson@Trentonian.com |

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On Friday, the Arc Mercer will be honoring multiple employees for their work on the front lines of the special needs community with a Gala event at the Stone Terrace in Hamilton. The non-profit, which has provided resources for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities for over 70 years, will deliver the Mayoral Champion Award to three Mercer County mayors for their contributions and commitment to those with special needs.

The event will also be used as a fundraiser for Project 601, an international chapter set to be in Liberia.

“The project that we are doing and the Gala is all related to staff,” said Steven Cook, executive director at Arc Mercer. “The biggest, most critical issue in our industry is finding staff.”

For most at the Arc Center, the staff is seen as family. Without their dedication, there would be no way for those in need to get access to the many services Arc provides including, residential, healthcare, vocational, transportation, and more.

The Gala will be used to acknowledge the employees who make the wheels turn with the Rising Star of the Year Award, Employee of the Year Award, and the “Dawn Caramosino” Team Impact Award.

Outside of the employees, Mayors Jeff Martin of Hamilton, Bert Steinmann of Ewing, and Reed Gusciora of Trenton will all receive the Mayoral Champion Award. Twelve of Arc Mercer’s nineteen homes can be found within these communities. While Mayors Steinmann and Guscoira are both long-serving members of the Arc Mercer’s board of directors, all three mayors have helped expand community-based homes, offer employment to hundreds of individuals and provide cultural and recreational experiences to the special needs community.

“The Gala is our chance to publicly recognize those who support our mission and exemplify why Arc Mercer is the premier agency serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities,” said Cook.

After the awards are given out, there will be a special presentation to announce Project 601, the first-ever International chapter of the Arc of the United States in Liberia. Liberians make up the largest population at the Mercer Arc center followed by, Nigerians, the Latin Community, and Haitians. Project 601, introduced on July 26, Liberian Independence Day, will provide advocacy and actual services utilizing the Arc Mercer staff to train and mentor counterparts in the Republic of Liberia. However Cook doesn’t plan on stopping there, expansion plans for Nigeria and Haiti are on the horizon.

“Nigeria is project 602,” Cook said. “Haiti will be third, Project 603.”

The Latin community is also said to be receiving international support once a country is picked.

“It’s understanding the culture, what needs to be done, and respect for where individuals came from and their culture that led the team here to be so committed to take this Gala and turn it into a fundraising opportunity to make the world a better place,” Cook said, “Not just in one country, but as many countries as we can touch.”