

INSIDE OUT / *The story behind Staten Island's stories*

# Betty Connelly's contributions live on

The fourth annual **Elizabeth A. Connelly Memorial Conference on Autism: Education and Interventions for Richer Lives** at the Hilton Garden Inn brought together more than 250 administrators, staff, teachers, speech pathologists, applied behavior analysts, and psychologists from organizations that provide services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Attendees also included parents seeking further understanding of their children's disabilities.

The event was sponsored by the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) and the Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene, Inc. (RFMH), and was hosted and organized by OMRDD's research arm, the Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities (IBR).

**Maureen Marlow** of the state IBR explains that the conference, established by her agency in 2007 as a memorial to Assemblywoman **Elizabeth Connelly**, presents advances in research and services in the field of developmental disabilities, including autism. This year's event featured presentations by experts in functional behavior analysis, social skills, communication skills, employment, behavior issues, and person-centered planning for individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Mrs. Connelly served in the state Assembly from 1973 through 2000, the first woman elected to public office on Staten Island. She served as chairwoman of the Assembly Committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities, Alcoholism and Substance Abuse from 1977 to 1993. In 1993, she was appointed chair of the Assembly Committee on Standing Committees, and in 1995,



CAROL ANN BENANTI

Speaker Pro Tempore, the highest-ranking position ever held by a woman in the history of the Assembly. Mrs. Connelly held this position until her retirement from the Assembly in 2000. She died in 2006 at the age of 77.

OMRDD Commissioner **Diana Jones Ritter** opened the conference, recalling the great passion Mrs. Connelly had for the people and families OMRDD serves.

"Betty was many things," said Dr. **W. Ted Brown**, in his welcoming remarks at the conference. "She was the first woman elected to public office on Staten Island. She was a champion for individuals with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and substance addiction. And she was instrumental in establishing the extensive programs of residences, supports, and services in the community that citizens of New York State with developmental disabilities, including autism, enjoy today. I would like to think that she would be very enthusiastic about our program today."

Ms. Marlow points out that speakers at the conference included Dr. **Ray Romanczyk**, founder and director of the Institute for Child Development, SUNY Binghamton; Dr. **Michelle Dunn**, director of clinical services at the Montefiore Autism Center, Yonkers; Dr. **Joanne Gerenser**, executive director of The Eden II Programs, Staten Island; **Brenda** and Dr. **Moshe Weitzberg**, founder and director of oper-



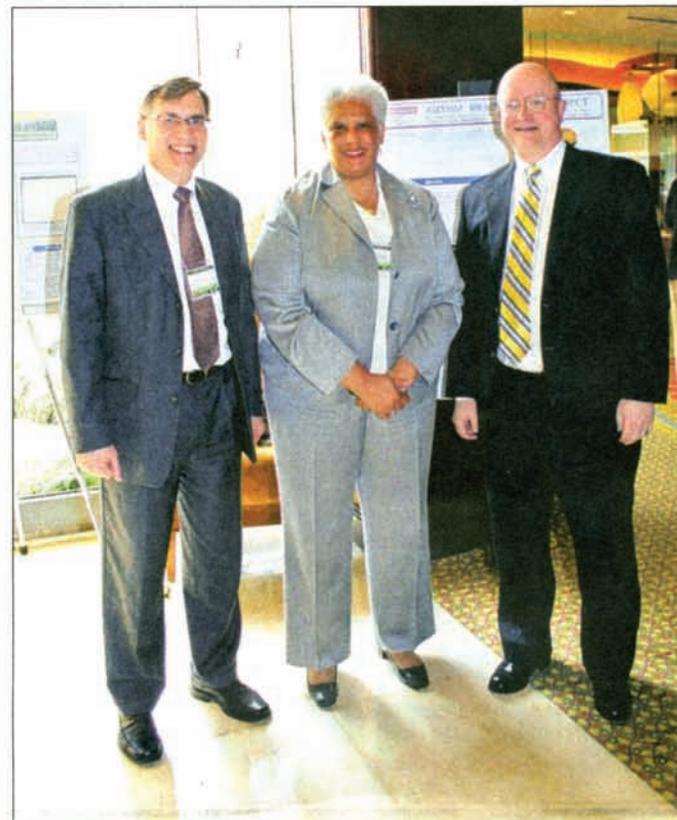
Elizabeth A. Connelly

ations, respectively, of Aspiritech, Chicago; **Joanne Bushart**, director of the Center for Employment Excellence, OMRDD, Albany; **Katrina Reese**, employment project coordinator at Job Path, Manhattan; self-advocate **Charles Cohen**; and IBR scientists Drs. **Christine Cea**, **Ira L. Cohen**, **Steve Holburn**, **Jenny Tuzikow** and **J. Helen Yoo**.

Distinguished guests were Mrs. Connelly's husband, **Bob**, and the couple's son, **Bob Jr.**, and IBR advisory board members **Jacqueline Rumolo** and **Henry J. Kennedy**.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARY ELLEN CAFARO, IBR



The Elizabeth A. Connelly Memorial Conference on Autism: Education and Interventions for Richer Lives at the Hilton Garden Inn, Bloomfield, brought together more than 250 administrators, staff, teachers, and doctors from organizations that provide services to individuals with developmental disabilities and parents seeking further understanding of their children's disabilities.

In the photo above are, from the left, attorney **Henry J. Kennedy**, Institute for Basic Research Advisory Board member; **Joseph J. Maturi**, IBR deputy director; **Robert V. Connelly**; **Robert V. Connelly, Jr.**; and Dr. **Edmund C. Jenkins**, co-chairperson, IBR Department of Human Genetics. In photo at left are, from the left, **Gary Lind**, state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities deputy commissioner; **Diana Jones Ritter**, OMRDD commissioner, and Dr. **W. Ted Brown**, IBR director.