



31st Annual Excellence AWARDS

On behalf of NYSACRA's 200 member agencies and associate members, the Board of Directors are pleased to announce the 31st Annual Excellence Award recipients. Epitomizing this year's theme—E's on Down the Road: Energize, Explore, Empower, Enlighten—our three awardees are Sean Delaney, Alice Elliott, and Matt Giordano. Their biographies below show how their dynamic, artistic talents, and their passion that is commensurate with the NYSACRA mission.

SEAN DELANEY

*Musician, Poet,
Direct Support Professional*



Sean Delaney is musician as well as a Direct Support Professional who is employed by Special Needs Program in Hudson, New York. Sean took time to be the guest at NYSACRA's Regional DSP Conferences and to attend ANCOR's Governmental Affairs Conference where he brought down the house with an a cappella version of his song, "Open Your Eyes."

After spending several years working with adults with autism

continued on back

ALICE ELLIOTT

*Film Maker, Artist
Activist*



Alice Elliott has been producing documentaries for over ten years. She established her company, Welcome Change Productions, in New York City in 1991, and started producing the same year. In late 1997, Alice began work on her directorial debut, *The Collector of Bedford Street*, which she also produced. Since its completion, *The Collector of Bedford Street* has visited 27 festivals and has won 13 awards. It has been nominated for

continued on back

MATT GIORDANO

*Drummer, Facilitator,
Speaker*



Matt Giordano is a drummer who lives in Rochester, NY and receives supports from LDA Life and Learning Services. Matt can drum on anything and "he's pretty darn good". But he is also a facilitator of drum circles that demonstrates that everyone has ABILITIES. His presentations are positive, informative and uplifting, as he strongly believes in the power of knowledge and awareness. Matt believes that when people have a

continued on back

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and other developmental disabilities, he felt compelled to speak to his generation. Sean's video of "Open Your Eyes" is a plea to his peers to open their eyes and encourages them to become more aware of his chosen profession. It has become a YouTube phenomenon that has received almost 300,000 "hits".

As Sean says in his song;

"Open your minds.
Open your hearts.

This goes out to staff members
who cared from the start,
played the part in
another individual's life.

You wouldn't know unless
you seen it with your
own two eyes'

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an Academy Award in the short documentary category. Additionally, *The Collector of Bedford Street*, has received critical praise from groups within the disability community including NYSACRA. Her most recent film, *Body & Soul: Diana & Kathy*, will be shown at our closing keynote. It depicts the lives of a 61-year-old woman with severe cerebral palsy and a woman with Down Syndrome who have been together for 38 years. The film examines a remarkable example of independent living and is only outdone by Diana and Kathy's unrelenting activism - they jeopardize their Medicare benefits in order to travel the country and lobby for disability rights.

Alice recently shared about her work as an advocate; "I'm creating change in the world by telling stories that might not get told. Exploring the ability to use art for change gives me a purpose to get up every morning. I like being an artist and an activist,"

MATT GIORDANO

*Drummer, Facilitator,
Speaker*

better understanding that everyone has challenges, then ridicule and bullying will be reduced and even eliminated. Matt often shares his life experiences of growing up with Tourette Syndrome and how he achieved success as a musician and an internationally recognized speaker. He demonstrates that when awareness, support, and inspiration are implemented - success can then be recognized.

As Matt says; "Imagine awakening to the rhythms of peace, understanding, compassion and acceptance. This intriguing premise sets the foundations for new experiences for everyone to be enriched by the power of drumming."

Each year NYSACRA selects a person, persons or a group of people to receive the NYSACRA Excellence Award. In order to receive this award, the nominee must make a significant contribution to the field of developmental disabilities and be in step with the vision and mission of NYSACRA.

Some of our past honorees include: Mary Ellen Tegtmeier & Pat Edelstein, two parents who help other parents of children with disabilities; Bill Ebenstein, from Reaching Up and the JFK Jr. Foundation; the Self Advocacy Association of NYS; Potential Unlimited; our Direct Support Workers who worked through the September 11th tragedy in lower Manhattan; Community Friends from Price Chopper in Clifton Park; and Commissioners Tom Maul and Lynn Angello for their efforts to improve our workforce—to name just a few.