



Penn Hills Office Reopens in Pittsburgh

DON's new office in Penn Hills is open! It is located on the same side of the road and only 1.8 miles from the previous office location that burned in July. The new address is 12140 Frankstown Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235. Callers can reach the office by dialing 866-652-5121.

The new space is located at a safer intersection with a bus stop and a crosswalk for consumers that visit using public transportation. There is a brand new ramp and accessible parking right in front of the office.

The new location hosts the Center for Independent Living, DON Services' attendant care program, a housing program administrator, an IT employee and an office space for A Bridge Home, which provides nursing home transition services for the region.



In 2020, the CIL is planning to host trainings and consumer events in the new office.

7th Annual Disability and Mental Health Summit

The 7th Annual Disability and Mental Health Summit will be held at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh on March 3rd, 2020. The format of the usual 3-day event was changed to a one-day celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the ADA. The Summit will run from 8am until 8pm and feature approximately 40 breakout sessions, multiple keynote speakers, and a vendor fair.

Upcoming Events

Souper Bowl Luncheon
Jan. 31

Disability & Mental Health Summit
March 3

Freedom Fair & Fireworks Festival
July 18

DON'S Office Closings

Feb. 17

Disability Options Network was selected to present on Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities. The objective of this session will be to prepare individuals on how to respond in case of localized/personal incidences, natural disasters, and how to interact with first responders and emergency management personnel to make sure that needs are met during evacuation or sheltering in place. Participants will learn what items should be in a "Go-Kit" and will also be given a starter "Go-Kit" and checklist to take with them. Register for the summit at www.disabilitysummit.com/registration/

It's All About You... Peer Support Group

Disability Options Network has a new peer support group for Individuals with acquired, physical disabilities in Allegheny County. The group — *It's all About You* — is supported by the FISA Foundation

The group holds several meetings throughout the region. Last session was at the Hope Network at Encompass Health. Marci Galore did a presentation on the adaptive sports activities offered by the Hope Network. Adaptive Sports/Recreational Activities offered through the Hope Network include: Adaptive Boccia, Hand Cycling, Personal Fitness Program, Wheelchair Basketball, Wheelchair Rugby, and much more. Attendees were invited to try out adaptive equipment after the presentation. Participants were also invited to participate in playing Adaptive Boccia.

It's All About You activities will be planned throughout the year and will be scheduled according to future events and social activities that are happening in the community. This will also include events that are focused on topics that are important to individuals who have a disability. Locations will vary every month.

Please visit our website and/or Facebook page for updates or contact Regis Charlton at 1 (888) 652-5144, Ext. 403 to inquire about the group's meeting schedule. Refreshments will be provided. An interpreter is available upon request and travel reimbursement is available to participants, if needed.

In the coming months there will be a second group that plans to gather in Westmoreland County when the Greensburg office location is fully operational. Look for more details in future issues of the newsletter.

DON Out and About in the Community

The DON group of companies played a major part in New Castle's 2019 holiday festivities by being a sponsor at the following events: BE Taylor Tribute concert, the ice-skating rink and the horse drawn carriage rides. These events were opportunities for people of all ages to enjoy the holidays in special ways.

Now we turn our attention to the 2020 Freedom Fair Fireworks Festival that will be held on Saturday, July 18, 2020 in downtown New Castle and the 30th Anniversary of the ADA events that are planned across the Allegheny County region in 2020, starting with Rep. Dan Miller's Disability Summit on March 3 at the David Lawrence Convention Center.

The Freedom Fair Fireworks Festival is a huge undertaking for DON as an organization. To be successful, we need food vendors, crafters, exhibitors and entertainment that wish to have space at the festival. If you know of a vendor that may have an interest, please connect with Shelley McConnell at (724) 652-5144, Ext. 181 or visit our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/fireworksNC/.

Other DON hosted events in the planning stages include a Souper Bowl luncheon in January and a Spring Fling dinner/dance in the spring.

DON Secures Another Grant for Additional New Homes

The year 2020 will be a very busy year for DON's Housing Department.

In mid-January DON will close on the first of five houses that are being built using the funds from the first Federal Home Loan Bank's grant which was awarded in December 2018.



Buyers for the other four houses have been identified and are now in the process of accumulating the documentation required to obtain their mortgages. The construction team has been working hard to get these homes built by the time spring rolls around.

On Dec. 19, 2019 DON received notification of receipt of a second grant for close to one million dollars to build eleven more houses, nine on New Castle's Lower East Side and two on New Castle's South Side in partnership with 10,000 Friends, a non-profit agency who is committed to revitalizing that area. We are now working on our extensive wait list to identify and prequalify potential buyers for those houses.

One of the requirements of the grants is that the buyers receive pre-closing and post-closing homeownership counseling to learn the responsibilities of being a homeowner and the importance of regular home maintenance.

The goal is to increase homeownership and anyone interested in learning how they can be considered to purchase one of these new, two or three bedroom homes can contact Anita McKeever at (724) 652-5144, Ext. 283.

Wellness Program Hosted by Disability Options Network

Disability Options Network's New Castle office, located at 831 Harrison Street, New Castle, PA will begin offering twice monthly peer wellness events for consumers and community members. Each session will include social time with snacks and a brief discussion around a theme. Here are the next session dates:

Thursday, March 5	11 am	Environmental Wellness
Tuesday, March 17	12:30 pm	Social Wellness
Thursday, April 2	11 am	Physical Wellness
Tuesday, April 21	12:30 pm	Financial Wellness

Sessions are open to anyone that wishes to participate and will last 60 to 90 minutes. It is not required but kindly requested that anyone planning to attend register by calling Dusty Costa at 724-652-5144 ext. 163 so materials and snacks can be provided.

Coming soon... Open gym days for DON consumers to be able to use accessible workout equipment to build strength and increase activity for better health.

Ticket to Work Program Incentives under Social Security

For individuals that collect social security benefits under Title II (often referred to as Social Security Disability Insurance payments) there are work incentive programs for those that would like to return to work under what is called the Ticket to Work Program. If folks are pursuing employment earning more than \$990/month here are some things that may be available:

Nine-Months Trial Work Period: Receive full SSDI benefits as long as earnings are reported. The nine-month cumulative trial work period is within a five-year period which means you do not have to work these nine months consecutively.

Extended Period of Eligibility: After completion of the Trial Work Period, you will have three-years in which you can receive an SSDI payment for any month your earnings are not considered "substantial" under the SSA guidelines. This is provided without a new application or new disability decision within this period.

Continuation of Medicare: Free Medicare Part A coverage continues for over seven years (93 months) after trial work period, regardless of earnings from employment. There are additional options of coverage for those with disabilities such as Medical Workers with Disabilities (M.A.W.D.).

Program specifics and details vary on a case by case basis so anyone interested in learning about their specific situation, should contact the Employment Network by calling (724) 652-5144 and ask for Lisa Didesiderio or Ray Eckles in the New Castle Region or Leah Gray at (724) 936-3900 in the Allegheny, Armstrong or Westmoreland Region.

Going Green! Tips for Saving the Earth...

1. Use energy efficient lightbulbs. Not only will this help save our planet, it will save you money! Did you know that if every house in the USA replaced just one light bulb, it would reduce pollution by the same amount as removing one million cars from the road?
2. Have a vegetarian, meat-free meal once a week. Did you know that it takes 2500 gallons of water to produce a single pound of beef?
3. Adjust the thermostat in your home by just one degree. Did you know that decreasing the temperature in your home by just one degree will save you 10% on your energy bill each year?

Have other ideas and suggestions? Send them to: tfranz@donservices.org

The 2020 Census is Accessible for Everyone

Beginning in March, residents in the United States will begin to complete the U.S. Census which will begin with a push for people to complete the census online. There will also be follow-up options to respond by phone or by mail and later this year even through home visits.

There is an option to respond online in English or in 12 additional languages. The online questionnaire is accessible, following the latest web accessibility guidelines. There will also be a video in American Sign Language available to guide folks through responding online.

By mid-April, The U.S. Census will mail a paper questionnaire to every household that hasn't already responded. (Some households will receive a paper questionnaire along with the first invitation in March.)

There are also braille and large print guides available online to assist people with completing the paper questionnaire.

If necessary, households will be able to respond in person beginning in mid-May. Census takers will visit all households that have not yet responded.

Responding is important. A complete count helps ensure that services like Medicare, Medicaid, social security, and public transportation can support those who need them.

Responding is safe. All of the information shared with the U.S. Census is protected by law and cannot be used for any other reason.

Responding is accessible. We're doing everything we can to ensure the ways to respond are accessible for everyone.

Any questions? Please visit 2020census.gov.

Disability Options Network Receives Donation from First Energy

Disability Options Network received a surprise donation of \$10,000 from *The FirstEnergy Foundation* on December 11, 2019. The 12 gifts of the season check was presented at the New Castle ice skating rink on Dec. 11. Photographed with the donation is (first row, l to r): Melissa Allen, Mrs. Clause, Dusty Costa, Santa Clause, Phil Berezniak. Second Row: Steve Empfield, Lori Daytner, Court Hower, and from First Energy, John Greenwood.



Meet Your IL Coordinator Jim (JC) Scialabba

I have been involved with DON in many capacities for more than eight years. February 2012 through November 2014, I served as an attendant with DON Services. In Oct. 2017 due to health issues I became a consumer. May 2018 through Oct. 2019 I worked for DON Services as an Identigo fingerprint technician for federal background prints. I also served on the Board of Directors for the Center for Independent Living. In November, 2019, I resigned my board position to become an employee of the CIL in the New Castle office, where I now serve as an Independent Living Coordinator. The most rewarding part of my new position is helping consumers navigate the difficulties in attaining the correct services to meet their needs.

In the years before DON, I worked for US Airways as a ramp agent and Northwest Airlines as a lead gate agent. I also was a PIAA football and basketball official. I also was a basketball official for PA Special Olympics. I enjoyed coaching the 7th/8th grade girls basketball at St. Monica Academy in Beaver Falls.

I grew up in New Brighton and currently reside in Beaver. I attended Quigley Catholic High School and Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology for architectural drafting. I am the son of Ruth Scialabba and the late Jim V. Scialabba. I am the oldest of 7 brothers and 6 sisters and Uncle to 3 nieces.

Disability Options Network-Greensburg Office

Disability Options Network is in the process of opening an office in Greensburg, PA. The Greensburg office will serve consumers who live in Armstrong and Westmoreland Counties, as well as, assist with overflow from Allegheny County.

In addition to the 5 core services, the new office will offer Employment Network services, housing assistance, free phone program, computer classes, recycled durable medical equipment, a diaper bank, peer support groups, and wellness programming which will include strengthening and conditioning, group fitness, and nutrition classes. The office will also showcase artwork from artists with disabilities from throughout the service area.

DON Services will also operate from this location with plans to provide attendant care throughout Westmoreland and the surrounding counties. The office will be located in the East Gate Shopping Center at 5142 US 30, Greensburg, PA 15601.

To connect with this office contact Leah Gray at (724) 936-3900, Ext. 501.

Things to Think About as a Renter

Once a year it is important to review important paperwork and get things in order. For those who rent there are some things to review in that process.

First, make sure to have a current copy of the lease agreement. This is the agreement between the tenant and the landlord and specifies all details of the relationship. If the rental unit is in need of any repairs or tenant has a hardship and can't pay the rent, there is a free resource that will assist the tenant to communicate with the landlord (www.hello landlord.org) by helping a tenant write a letter to their landlord which may help work out a solution.

Second, it is important to have renter's insurance for the contents of the rental unit. If there is a fire, the landlord is not responsible for replacing a tenant's possessions. It is a good idea to record an inventory of furniture, appliances, electronics, or other items of value and keep a copy of this inventory list, perhaps with photographs too, in a separate location. It is best practice to keep proof of purchase with date and cost of items. Renters are more likely to get reimbursement if they have proof of what they own.

Third, there is a provision of the law that a rental unit must meet a warrant of habitability. This means if the unit has no running water or heat because of a needed repair, the landlord is required to make those repairs. Again, it is important to know the terms of the lease which spells out what responsibility lies where.

If you are looking for a suitable rental try www.pahousingsearch.com. A good rule is that no more than 30 to 35% of a person's monthly income should be spent on rent. Subsidized housing assistance can be an option for those unable to afford the rent in their community. There can be waiting lists for this assistance and submitting applications properly is the key.

HR 1865 (Formerly HR 2293)

On December 20, 2019, President Trump signed HR 1865 into law. This law exempts manual rehabilitative wheelchairs from Medicare's Competitive Bid Pricing (CBP) program for 18 months. This was the culmination of years of work in removing power and manual rehabilitation wheelchairs from the CBP program. Advocates have argued that CBP makes it impossible for patients to get seating, headrests, and other key parts of their wheelchairs designed to help treat their specific disability. This has left patients with life-long illnesses unable to access wheelchair designs to meet their needs. This was not the original intent of the previous rules, which only exempted regular manual wheelchairs from CBP. Despite arguments that this was an oversight, it has taken years to fix this problem. In 2017, it was announced that power wheelchairs would be exempt from CBP. However, manual rehabilitative wheelchairs were not mentioned but with this law that will change.

Some Money Savings Tips

Credit Card Late Fees – Missing your due date by even one day can result in a late fee of \$28 to \$39 on your statement. You might be able to get that fee refunded if it was a one-time oversight. 84% of the people who ask for a break get it.

Bank Fees – Avoid ATM withdrawal fees by using the cash back option when making purchases with your debit card. You shouldn't have to pay for a checking account. More than 40% of banks and 80% of credit unions offer free checking with no minimum balance requirement, avoiding approximately \$144 in fees per year. Dodge overdraft fees by tracking your spending to avoid going over your balance.

Food Waste – A survey found that American households waste approximately \$640 every year by tossing out almost a pound of food per day. Freeze leftovers and produce that may be a little past their prime and use them in soups, casseroles and stews.

Toiletries and Cosmetics – Discounters like TJ Maxx and Marshalls are a good go-to source for brand-name moisturizers, face and body washes, cosmetics and hair products. You could easily save over 40% on these items.

Amazon Prime – If you are paying for Amazon Prime only for fast free shipping on purchases, you might be better off dropping out and saving the \$119 annual fee. Any Amazon customer can usually get free shipping on qualifying orders of at least \$25. Prime members who register a valid EBT (including WIC, TANF, and SNAP) or Medicaid (including Medi-Cal) card can receive access to all Prime benefits at a discounted monthly charge. Walmart.com now offers free next day delivery on orders of at least \$35.

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