

SU Food Services Honored by ARC of Onondaga

By Keith Kobland



Arc of Onondaga Award Picture: (From left to right) Ellen Gutmaker, Executive Director of Arc of Onondaga; Mark Tewksbury, Director SU Food Services, Residential Dining and Carrier Dome Concessions and Merchandise; Sean Broderick, President, Arc of Onondaga Foundation Board of Directors; Stephen Brandt, Dining Center Manager, Ernie Davis and Shaw Dining; James Blackmon, Dining Center Manager, Brockway Dining; Kathy Hellinger, Dining Center Manager, Graham Dining; Chuck Seereiter, Vice President, Arc of Onondaga Board of Directors

Providing for the many tastes and nutritional needs of the campus community is all in a day's work for SU Food Services. Employees there work in a variety of functions. Among them is Bill Geis. For the past 32 years, Geis has worked as a non-food handler in Shaw Hall, cleaning pots and pans. He's the self-proclaimed mayor of the dining facility, as he gets along with everyone there.

"Bill is a pleasure to work with because of his positive attitude," says Manager Steve Brandt. "He is always happy to come to work"

For Dominick Valentino, it's a similar story. For 16 years he's worked in the dining centers, first at Haven, and now at Ernie Davis Hall. Students see him at the front door greeting them for lunch or dinner. "If they come to the dining center a lot, I get to learn their names and joke with them. One time a student wrote a nice comment about me, which made me feel really good."

Both Geis and Valentino are part of the fabric that makes up the campus workforce. Both are well known and well liked. Between them they bring nearly a half century of experience to the hill. Their work here is one of the reasons why Arc of Onondaga is recognizing SU Food Services

with this year's Robert D. McAuliffe Community Service Award. The award recognizes a local organization that works to integrate individuals with developmental disabilities into their daily workforce and is dedicated to helping those Arc of Onondaga serves to overcome obstacles.

The award reads:

"SU Food Services employs six Arc individuals at five dining center locations on both a part and full-time basis. Their supervisory staff are extremely supportive and continually go above and beyond to ensure each worker is treated fairly, and with dignity and respect. They make sure all co-workers are cognizant of any potential risks that may arise on the job and are willing to assist if need be, and ensure that all individuals have the support they need for success when new changes are implemented. SU Food Services also employs individuals with disabilities who do not receive supports from Arc of Onondaga, making them, truly, a commendable employer to work for."

According to Brandt, assistance is always provided with paperwork, job-bidding (Valentino successfully bid on his new job as entry checker at Ernie Davis) or computer work needed for the position. "If we notice that there is a personal issue, we notify family members to make them aware," according to Brandt.

Staff also go the extra mile. Geis, after 32 years on the job, is retiring this summer. Brandt brought him to human resources to sort out retirement information, even arranging for an attorney to assist in managing Geis' retirement income.

"We also help guide them to making better choices whether it is a health, personal, or even financial issue," says Brandt.

But in the end, it's about people helping people who get the job done. "I like my supervisors and the people that I work with," says Valentino. "I especially like it when my supervisors trust me with more responsibilities. It makes me feel like I'm doing a good job."