



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senator Young Awards Frank Guyett of Jamestown With Special Award

CATHARINE YOUNG August 21, 2008

State Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C - Olean) today honored Frank Guyett from Jamestown with this year's New York State Senate's Achievers' Award. The prestigious award recognizes an individual's ability to overcome personal physical challenges and honors their accomplishments on behalf of their community.

"The Achievers Award is an honor that recognizes the triumph of individuals over sometimes daunting physical challenges and is bestowed on those whose efforts serve as an example of courage, personal excellence and achievement for our entire community," said Senator Young.

Mr. Guyett, 24, has a cognitive disability, a pervasive developmental disorder and autism. He also has a severe expressive disorder that has limited his ability to communicate. Throughout most of his life, he used grunts, hand gestures and sign language to communicate. Mr. Guyett struggles with sign language because he has difficulty manipulating his fingers and differentiating small movements of the hands. Thus, only the people closest to him – his family and staff members – were the only ones who could understand him. Mr. Guyett is a social young man who wants to interact with others, and it was frustrating for him to not be understood.

Mr. Guyett obtained a Dynavox speech-generated device in 2000 and learned to communicate effectively with the device. However, the Dynavox was cumbersome, required Mr. Guyett to use both hands to hold and was impractical for use in some social situations because it interrupted the normal give-and-take of conversation. It also required regular maintenance, and Mr. Guyett was unable to communicate whenever the device was away being repaired.

Two summers ago, Mr. Guyett obtained a new speech-generated device. Lightweight, Mr. Guyett can hold it in one hand and operate it with the other. The new computer allows Mr. Guyett to build his vocabulary and link pages to enable conversational turn-taking.

Working weekly with a speech therapist, he has made tremendous progress. He is able to ask and answer questions, state his likes and dislikes, talk with peers, call people by their names, and talk about what is going on in his life.

Since obtaining his new communication device, Mr. Guyett has joined a local 4-H Club that accepts adults with developmental disabilities as members. At last year's Chautauqua County Fair (at which Mr. Guyett received several blue ribbons for his projects), Mr. Guyett was able to answer the judges' questions himself, without having to rely on staff to communicate for him. This year, he went one better – with support from his Speech Therapist, staff at his Day Program, his 4-H leader, and his family, Mr. Guyett put together on his computer a presentation on how the device has changed life. He spent months working on his presentation, creating supporting posters and other visual aids. In March, Mr. Guyett gave his presentation to 4-H judges, operating the entire program himself. He received another blue ribbon.

Mr. Guyett is proud of his achievements with his communication device. Being able to communicate with others has made him more independent, and staff members hope Mr. Guyett will be able to engage in more community-based activities and perhaps obtain a job.

Learning to better communicate is one aspect of what one of Mr. Guyett's staff members termed his rite of passage. In April, he moved from the adolescent group home where he had lived for years and into a home for adults.

As proud as Mr. Guyett is of himself, his family and staff are more proud of what he has been able to accomplish. "Frank is just a very friendly person," reports his service coordinator. "He likes attention, he likes to help people, he is truly concerned with other people's feelings, takes pride in his appearance, and just an all-out great guy to know. I'm really happy for Frank, and I'll do whatever I can do assist him in excelling even further in life, even though he's the one that's done the hard work to get to where he is today."

The New York State Senate Achievers Awards are presented each year in conjunction with Senate Disability Awareness Day, an annual event sponsored by the Senate to raise public awareness of the efforts and accomplishments of citizens with physical disabilities.