



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Russell Salvatore, Senator Tim Kennedy Join Cantalician Center for Learning to Unveil Newly Remodeled Courtyard for Students with Disabilities

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY September 28, 2021

| ISSUE: **CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, DISABILITY ADVOCACY, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**



DEPEW, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) and Russell J. Salvatore joined Cantalician Center for Learning Executive Director Anne Spisiak Tuesday to unveil the newly renovated Russell J. Salvatore Courtyard for students with disabilities at its Academic Campus on George Urban Boulevard in Depew. The project was made possible through a \$200,000 donation from the Russell J. Salvatore Foundation and a \$100,000 state grant secured by Kennedy for the nonprofit.

For years, the Cantalician Center’s courtyard was a large, concrete space used as a secure environment for students to play outside, but wasn’t child-friendly. The concrete surface would become very hot in the

summer, and was unusable in the winter. Additionally, the hard surface posed a risk for students who struggled with behavioral or mobility issues, and the space had no equipment or functional spaces within, ultimately discouraging children from playing together.

The renovation project has since transformed the space into one designed for children to play, interact, and have fun featuring a new and safe turf surface, sensory play tables, outdoor musical instruments, benches, large umbrellas, and canopy shading. It also now includes outdoor eating and communal spaces for every purpose and occasion.

"When the Cantalician Center told me about their vision for their courtyard space, and described just how transformative it would be for their students with special needs, I knew my office needed to get involved immediately," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "As an occupational therapist myself, I know that a healing, interactive environment like this will bring students at the Center together, and foster an inclusive space. Russell Salvatore and I were proud to deliver the full funding to bring this courtyard to life because we fully believe in the Cantalician Center mission and their fierce and tireless efforts to be the best advocates for their students."

"I'm so happy to hear the project was completed and is being enjoyed daily by the students and staff at the Cantalician Center. This Center provides so many different services, to so many people of all ages, that I knew this opportunity, to get involved, was right for me," said **Russell J. Salvatore, Restaurateur and Philanthropist**.

"We are thrilled with our safe and fun Russell J. Salvatore Courtyard and we owe it all to the giving spirit of Russell Salvatore and Senator Tim Kennedy," said **Jason Petko, Director of Education, Cantalician Center**. "The renovation has transformed the once barren and minimally usable space into an outdoor oasis that students with sensory issues, orthopedic impairments, fine and gross motor delays need to play, learn, and grow. The new space also offers a safe, functional space for our students of all abilities to enjoy together."

"The dream of the Russell J. Salvatore Courtyard has finally come true. The students and staff have been so grateful to utilize this beautiful space for water play activities, music classes, class readings, snack time, yoga, and much more. This project is the perfect example of positive public and private investment and we are overjoyed that our students are able to enjoy the fruits of this collaborative effort," said **Anne Spisiak, Executive Director, Cantalician Center**. "On behalf of the children, people, and families we support at Cantalician Center, our staff, and Board of Directors, we would sincerely like to thank Russell Salvatore and Senator Tim Kennedy for their generosity."

The courtyard renovation was completed in four phases. The first phase included utilizing the state funding to remove the old, inefficient windows that lined the courtyard and replacing them with energy efficient windows that reduce energy costs and keep the academic building cool in warmer weather. The second through fourth phases included the utilization of funding from the Russell J. Salvatore Foundation to prepare the space for renovations, the installation of canopies for shade, the installation of rubber turf, the installation of various outdoor accessories, sporting equipment, seating, landscaping, and more. The rendering concept for the project was donated to the Cantalician Center by Senior Landscape Architect David Kenyon of Wendel Companies.

“As designers we basically aim to improve quality of life with our designs, so collaborating on the courtyard with the fine folks at Cantalician Center was a match made in heaven,” said **David Kenyon, Senior Landscape Architect, Associate Principal, Wendel Companies.**

Cantalician Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that offers meaningful, integrated services to hundreds of children and adults with developmental disabilities and people in need across Western New York from birth through retirement through its Early Childhood Community Services, School Age, Preschool and Daycare Services, as well as its Day Habilitation Services, Employment Services, and Contract Sales through its division Diversified Labor Solutions.

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