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## **Burton Blatt Institute creates public learning campaign to challenge perceptions toward individuals with disabilities**

Peter Blanck, chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University, has announced the creation of a public learning campaign to challenge negative perceptions about the ability of individuals with disabilities. "It is our intention to bring together expertise from various colleges at Syracuse University, working in partnership with BBI to design a public learning campaign that would lead to fundamental and positive attitude changes concerning people with disabilities," Blanck says. "This will be accomplished by developing face-to-face and Web-based programs at a high school in Onondaga County."

BBI will lead a series of forums and develop a social marketing campaign using print and interactive media involving students at a selected high school working together with SU students to challenge limited expectations about the capacity of individuals with disabilities to work, be productive and contribute to their communities.

The stigma of disability is a topic rarely discussed with students both with and without disabilities at a high school level. Despite efforts, negative public attitudes are an obstacle to inclusive social participation. The initiative is to begin next spring. BBI welcomes stakeholder feedback as the project goes through its formative stages.

The public learning campaign is funded by a grant secured by Assemblyman Al Stirpe. According to Brian McLane, executive director of BBI, "Assemblyman Stirpe has been greatly interested in the work of the Burton Blatt Institute since its inception." BBI has met with Stirpe to discuss how best to address the issues of importance of New Yorkers with disabilities and how BBI's research may impact adults and students with disabilities.

Stirpe has long been concerned with the rights of the disabled. He has served on the board of directors of Familycapped, a nonprofit organization composed of parents of children with multiple disabilities, formed to expand programs for handicapped

children in Central New York. He was directly involved in helping raise more than \$1 million to build Casey's Place, a respite home for families caring for disabled children.

"As the father of a disabled daughter, I have seen firsthand the challenges that individuals with disabilities face on a daily basis," says Stirpe. "As a community, we have to find ways to change the public's attitude toward people with disabilities. The creation and development of a public learning campaign in conjunction with a local high school will begin to challenge the perceptions that are formed early on. I'm confident that the Burton Blatt Institute, noted for its efforts to advance the social, civic and economic participation of the disabled, will create a very useful tool for other high schools to learn and benefit from. I'm pleased to be able to help facilitate this initiative."

This new BBI initiative advances *Scholarship in Action* with the engagement of faculty and students from multiple disciplines on several levels. SU students and faculty will have an opportunity to learn more about the stigma associated with disability and the adverse impact on community participation. Students at an area high school will have the opportunity to learn about the abilities of individuals with disabilities and their aspirations and contributions to community life. SU students and faculty will have the value-added benefit of engaging students and teachers at the high school to learn together about the powerful use of communication strategies to change public perceptions and attitudes.

BBI fosters public-private dialogue to advance the civic, economic and social participation of persons with disabilities in a global society. BBI takes its name from Burton Blatt (1927–85), a pioneer in humanizing services for people with disabilities. BBI currently has offices in Syracuse, New York City, Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Tel Aviv.

For more information, visit <http://bbi.syr.edu> or contact Brian McLane, BBI executive director, at (315) 443-6140 or [bpmclane@law.syr.edu](mailto:bpmclane@law.syr.edu).

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