



NJAMHAA Newswire

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GCADA Reaches New Heights at Annual Summit with Largest Attendance to Date; Gov. McGreevey as Keynote Speaker and a Full Range of Workshops

Today the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (GCADA) held its annual summit titled "Creating Healthy and Safe Communities" which was hosted at the Hyatt Regency in New Brunswick. The summit prepared a 1st class line up of speakers and workshops for substance use treatment and behavioral health professionals to learn from and engage. The venue was full with attendees topping 800 people which was a significant increase from last year's impressive turn-out. Attending the conference to represent NJAMHAA was Randy Thompson, Director of Public Affairs.

Opening Ceremonies

Celina Gray, Director of Public Awareness and Community Relations for GCADA opened the ceremonies introducing both, Acting Chairman of GCADA, Neil Van Ess and Executive Director of GCADA, John Hulick. Van Ess, who is also a war veteran, a long time serving law enforcement officer and community advocate, stated that over the 18 years which he has had the opportunity to serve GCADA "this year has been the best with unprecedented support from our Governor by his appointing John Hulick as Executive Director, appointing 8 new members to serve on GCADA and also his Drug Court expansion."

Executive Director of GCADA, John Hulick was next to speak beginning with a moving statement "I would like to say that I am a person in long-term recovery" saying that he openly discloses his recovery to put a human face to people in recovery. Hulick went on to state that the stigma of addiction was one of the biggest problems facing people suffering this disorder, people in recovery and the professionals who offer substance use treatment services. "I read the distressing news report that yet another recovery treatment facility was denied a variance...we need to break the stigma of addiction."

Former New Jersey Governor, Jim McGreevey was the keynote speaker of the event. Gov. McGreevey began with several vivid parables which detailed one of the core concepts he teaches in his role as a counselor to recovering incarcerated women, which is letting go and

accepting a higher power. Gov. McGreevey reflected on his own life and how he has had to follow this lesson to achieve a turning point for himself. "When I was a young man I had clear goals and I went about achieving them diligently, but I also edged God out from my life....8 years ago when I resigned from office it seemed like the lowest point of my life but actually it was the most saving moment in my life" Gov. McGreevey said. He continued to depict how "self-surrender is the key to self-transformation" and that the "most powerful force in recovery is reclaiming the higher power in our lives." Governor McGreevey's speech lifted many of the 800 plus attendees to their feet to give applause and set an inspiring and invigorated tone for the rest of the day.

A Glimpse of Workshops and Sessions

Attendees then dispersed for a series of workshops which ranged on topics including: Creating Healthy and Safe Communities through Faith Based 12 Step Programs; Current Drug Trends and Emerging Drugs of Abuse; It's Time to Create Your Own Evidence Base!; Teenage Addiction: A Pain in the Brain and A Conversation: Empowering Families.

One Workshop titled "NJ Municipal Planning Boards: A Data Drive Response to Juvenile Delinquency" was presented by Wanda Moore of the Attorney General's Office (AG), Thomas Huth of the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office, Louis Paparozzi of Janus Solutions and Dr. Roland Anglin of Rutgers University. In this workshop, speakers detailed how the formation of municipal planning boards allow the coalitions, which are representative of a large part of the broader communities, to use data to intercede to prevent juveniles from becoming involved in crime. Looking at data allows the Boards to "look for gaps" said Wanda Moore of the AG's Office. Moore went on to cite an example that in Trenton it was discovered that the majority of murders were a result of domestic violence incidents, previously unknown information. Thomas Huth and Lou Paparozzi, spoke specifically of the Asbury Park Planning Board which has instituted such programs as a "Chaplaincy Program" and utilizing "'Station House Adjustments" where the police department will attempt to dissuade the juvenile from further criminal activity.

NJAMHAA's Director of Public Affairs, Randy Thompson asked the presenters "what their data searches had revealed about the lack of mental health and substance use treatment services, given the known treatment gap and the tight correlation with criminal justice contact and other emergency services that these disorders have when they go untreated." Wanda Moore of the AG's office responded that the treatment gap is always a concern but often it is a systemic state-level issue. Thompson reaffirmed that NJAMHAA will continue partnering with the State and other advocacy organizations to address the treatment gap but encouraged the Municipal Boards to use their voice to put a local context on a state-wide issue and offered collaboration with NJAMHAA.

An afternoon session titled "Healing Communities from Addiction and Trauma: A Strengths Based Approach" was presented by Phil Diaz provided an intensely engaging journey of how to first identify and then put positive outlooks on traumatic situations and their effects on the individual. In this workshop Diaz explained the concept of "Self-parenting" which he described as adults learning to search themselves to learn what they are lacking as a result of not receiving proper care as children and self-providing that for themselves as adults. Diaz went on to state that positive (or negative) outlook can become one's reality "what you think becomes reality,

what you say out of your lips, becomes reality." Diaz elaborated further "this is why I never refer to my patients as "Addicts" you don't equate someone with their illness or problems rather I refer to them as people in recovery." Diaz went on to give several insightful and philosophical maxims designed to empower people. Wrapping up on his presentation, Diaz noted that perspective and self-empowerment are critical tools for someone recovering "you can only give up your spirit, they can't take it" and referred to the late Dr. Martin Luther King who was robbed of his earthly existence but whose spirit was never dampened during the tumultuous time of the civil rights movement and lives on till today.

Awards and Recognitions

For the second year in a row, GCADA presented the Cary Edwards State Volunteer of the Year Award. This award was established last year by GCADA. GCADA Executive Director, John Hulick presented the award to Janice Georgallas who showed exemplary leadership in unifying four municipalities into a successful prevention coalition including Hillsdale, Montvale, Rivervale and Woodcliff Lakes. A surprise endorsement of the success of Georgallas' achievements was made by GCADA member, Paul Ressler. Ressler whose son Cory Ressler passed away from an overdose, explained that he had established the Cory Ressler Memorial Fund to help foster awareness of addiction and to honor his son Cory. In a very moving moment, Mr. Ressler presented Georgallas with a check for \$1,000 to use towards the Prevention Coalition she represents.

A yearly tradition of honoring several County Volunteers of the Year was done as well. Exceptional local advocates from Municipal Alliances across the state were recognized for their invaluable contributions to their communities. Rebecca Alfaro, Director of Prevention and Training for GCADA presided over these awards announcing the recipients and short biographies of each advocate.

Celina Gray, Director of Public Awareness and Community Relations for GCADA also presented the Community Service Award to radio station NJ 101.5 who has done in-depth coverage of addiction and substance use disorder issues.

NJAMHAA CEO, Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D. said of GCADA "The Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse has been a superb partner in raising awareness of many critical issues affecting New Jersey's children and adults affected by alcoholism and substance use disorders as well as mental health disorders. NJAMHAA would like to congratulate the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, their staff, and their many supporters who contributed to this excellent Summit." Dr. Wentz is also an appointed member of the Governor's Task Force on Heroin and Other Opiate Use along with John Hulick and other GCADA members.

See what other NJAMHAA members who were in attendance at the GCADA Summit had to say about today's program:

Robert Budsock, CEO and President of Integrity House, the organization through which Governor McGreevey helps recovering incarcerated women stated "Gov. Jim McGreevey embodies recovery. From personal experience, he understands what it means to be stripped of ego and left with a broken soul. He uses his experience and his formal training to reach the

most desperate souls and give them hope on their path to recovery. His speech today was riveting and touched everyone in the room regardless of their personal trials. His message was passionate and filled with hope for those who can't seem to find their way out of their downtrodden situations. He has been a great addition to the Integrity House program and spreads his message of hope to the neediest and those who have lost their way."

Jim Curtin, CEO of Daytop Village said of the Summit "John Hulick, Celena Gray, Rebecca Alfaro & the GCADA team are to be commended for putting on a well thought out, informative and inspirational conference where do many gathered about a cause second to none when it comes to concerned New Jerseyans. Governor McGreevey provided the highlight of the day with a message that struck both at the heart of the problem and the solution."

Don Weinbaum, Executive Director of The Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ "The Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ has been participating in the GCADA Summit for many years, and from our standpoint, it was one of the best and certainly the biggest in my memory. It brought together more than 800 people from across NJ and definitely focused attention on National Recovery Month. We were very pleased to see the growing awareness and interest in gambling addiction among the attendees."

Michael Rooney , Associate Director, Government Relations , Alkermes, Inc. "As a NJAMHAA member, I see great opportunity to partner with GCADA and all of the Municipal Alliances. When the community and the Governor's Council fully understand our work, our challenges and our innovations, we will all be better prepared to succeed in the changing Healthcare Market headed our way."