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**Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE)**  
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### **3ND ANNUAL ADVOCACY/DISABILITY AWARENESS CONFERENCE SERVES AS EMPOWERMENT EVENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**



Pictured from L-R : Leon Marquis, CPRP, Regional Advocacy Specialist, Long Island Field Office, New York State Office of Mental Health; Jerelyn Silvestro; Advocacy Director, FREE; Keynote speaker, Marilyn Tucci, Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator, Silo; and Michael S. and Maureen B., Self Advocates from FREE's Speaker's Bureau.

**Old Bethpage, NY** – On Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE) held

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their **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Advocacy/Disability Awareness Conference**. As March is **Disability Awareness Month**, the Conference brought together individuals served by FREE in their day and residential programs and individuals in FREE's self-advocacy groups to show that, while people with disabilities need support, they are capable of accomplishing their goals.

"It's important that our community remember that the ability to achieve their dreams is within them. At FREE we believe that people are defined by their strengths and inherent value and not their disability and what may be perceived as the impossible can be accomplished." said Christopher Long, Executive Vice President and Chief Operations Officer of FREE.

The keynote speaker for the event was Marilyn Tucci, an Outreach Specialist at Suffolk independent Living Organization (SILO). Ms. Tucci is SILO's leading advocate for people with disabilities and is a champion for their rights.

During her address, Ms. Tucci, who is sight impaired herself, reminded those in attendance that, "Disabilities should not hold us back. We have abilities not disabilities."

In addition to members of the FREE community, representatives from Adults and Children with Learning Disabilities (ACLD), the Self Advocacy Association of NYS, and the Nassau County Department of Social Services were also in attendance

#### **About FREE**

Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE) founded in 1977 and headquartered in Old Bethpage, benefits and proudly supports more than 3,500 individuals with intellectual disabilities, mental illness and traumatic brain injury. It is the mission of FREE to help individuals of all abilities realize their full potential. FREE provides a diverse array of supports and services including: housing, recovery services, transition to work, employment, day, community and family services, respite, crisis services, education and after-school support, primary and specialty health care and advocacy. For more information, please call 516-870-7000 or visit [www.familyres.org](http://www.familyres.org).

#### **About SILO**

The purpose of the Suffolk Independent Living Organization, Inc. is to enable people with disabilities of Suffolk County, New York to gain effective control and direction of their lives. SILO advocates and promotes a growing sense of personal dignity and responsible community participation through training, community development and direct services responsive to the needs of the people.

<http://www.silobinc.org>.

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