



LIFE Conference Planning Committee Announces Theme for 2020 Conference

Annual disabilities conference to highlight the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Dover, Del. – September 17, 2019 – Everyone loves a good theme, and for the LIFE Conference Planning Committee, the choice for the 21st annual LIFE Conference was obvious. The year 2020 coincides with the **30th Anniversary** year of the landmark **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** legislation, a fact that was not lost on the Planning Committee. Terri Hancharick, LIFE Conference Committee member and Vice-Chair of the State Council for Persons with Disabilities stated: “The ADA was the first comprehensive landmark civil rights law that addressed people with disabilities in the U.S. and protected their rights. The ADA provided comprehensive protection of people with disabilities from discrimination and ensured their rights to access and full inclusion with employment, program access and public accommodations. My daughter Brigitte has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. Brigitte was 3 years old when the ADA was passed. It has affected her life significantly. Thanks to the work of the advocates that came before her, such as ADAPT (a national advocacy organization), she and others are empowered to be included in society. Before the ADA many people with disabilities were separated from their families, living in institutions. Everyone has the right to live, work, play, and travel from one place to another in their communities. We are all better for an inclusive society.”

Held each year in January, the LIFE Conference focuses on the needs of Delawareans with disabilities and their families. The acronym “LIFE” represents **L**egislation, **I**ndependence (through Assistive Technology), **F**amily, and **E**ducation. Each year, the conference features a central keynote presentation, followed by breakout sessions for each of the key areas of legislation, independence through assistive technology, family, and education. Terri Hancharick shared that: “The LIFE Conference Committee is very excited about the session entitled ‘30 Years of the ADA, the Journey.’ One of the original ADAPT disability activists who helped bring the ADA to the floor for a vote will speak about the journey to the ADA. Julie Farrar, one of the other speakers was a teenager at the time. Daniese McMullin Powell, one of our LIFE Conference Committee members is also a member of ADAPT and has spent many years working for disability rights and protesting all across the country for the rights of people with disabilities. The committee hopes that this session of the conference in January will start off the 30th anniversary of the ADA with a year of celebration!”

This year, the Committee is delighted to bring self-advocates Ricardo and Donna Thornton to Delaware to share the compelling story of their journey on the road from institution to inclusion. Ricardo and Donna are no strangers to advocacy, having both grown up in the notorious Forest Haven Institution outside of Washington, DC. Through grit, determination and strength combined with reinforcement from legislation such as the ADA and the Olmstead Decision, Ricardo and Donna were not only able to leave the institution, marry, live independently and start a family, but also to assist with the permanent closure of Forest Haven in 1991. The couple has appeared on multiple national television shows including 60 Minutes, and was the inspiration for the 2003 film "Profoundly Normal." In his testimony to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Ricardo stated, "We'd like to see more people living independent lives in the community. Let's not look back at the institution as an answer, let's look forward to the future."

With 30 years of the ADA behind us as a society, and many more ahead, the LIFE Conference Planning Committee believes that is a statement everyone can support.

The 2020 LIFE Conference will be held on January 29, 2020 at Dover Downs Conference Center. For more information about the conference, please visit the website at www.lifeconferencede.org.

For more information, or to arrange an interview:

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