CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS CONNECTOR

All ages. All abilities. All together.

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SPRING 2019



When Cushing opportunity knocked, new CEO answered

By Paul Halloran

John Von Ahn was ready for the next stage of his career after leaving the Washington, Warren & Albany Counties (N.Y.) Arc last July, following a successful 11-year tenure as executive director, he just wasn't sure what that would look like.

He thought he might turn to his law degree and advocate for people with developmental disabilities, or perhaps do some consulting for agencies in that field. One thing he thought he

was pretty sure of: "I had no notions of being an executive director again."

That started to change when he was made aware of the opening at Cushing, following the departure of Peter O'Meara, who retired after coming off the board of directors to serve as president and CEO for 21/2 years. The more Von Ahn learned, the more he was intrigued.

"The opportunity to affect positive financial change drew me in," Von Ahn said, "but that's not what got me to say yes."

Von Ahn was impressed after meeting with the search committee and the board, but what sealed the deal was a trip to Milwaukee to visit with the good Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, the order that founded Cardinal Cushing Centers in 1947 at the behest of Richard Cardinal Cushing.

"All I can say is, 'Wow," Von Ahn said of his initial meeting with the Sisters. "They are the most selfless, endearing, thoughtful people I have

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Many things we can agree on



JOHN VON AHN

For any of you Red Sox fans who may have reservations about a New York guy coming in to take the helm at Cushing, please know this: as a lifelong Mets fan I hate the Yankees as much or more than you do. So there.

As you will read elsewhere in this edition of the Cardinal Cushing Centers Connector, I never imagined I would be here. But, after first hearing of the

opportunity, the more I learned about Cushing,

the more intrigued I was. And my meeting with

the good Sisters sealed the deal.

I am truly excited to be at Cushing. Yes, there are challenges, but that is the case with virtually every nonprofit and educational institution. I believe we are well positioned to meet those challenges. We have a capable and engaged board, passionate and dedicated staff, and generous and committed donors, all of whom are committed to our mission of providing opportunity, possibility and hope to people of all ages and all abilities.

We can all be proud of the level of services we provide to the individuals that are entrusted to our care. We are mindful, however, that we must always be in search of new and innovative programs and service-delivery methods.

Having worked in finance for more than a decade before venturing into the world of social services, I understand completely the need to have our financial house in order. Be assured that efforts in that area are ongoing and a priority.

I believe I can bring a new perspective to Cushing, one that is informed by two decades of working on behalf of those who need and deserve our attention and care. As I settle into this position, I look forward to meeting those who share a love for this wonderful institution.

John Von Ahn is president and CEO of

Enjoy the spring.

Cardinal Cushing Centers.

When Cushing opportunity knocked, new CEO answered

CEO from Page I

ever met. After two days in Wisconsin, there was no way I could say no if the opportunity presented itself."

Indeed it did. Von Ahn was selected by the Cushing board and started his new position on March 22. He said he is coming into a good situation, though not one without challenges.

"At Cushing, there are no qualitative issues. All the services are top-flight. There are people who are there for the right reasons – to serve people who need it," he said, though "we are facing some challenging financial hurdles."

Von Ahn, who earned his undergraduate degree in accounting and is a CPA, said his priority will be to address those issues.

"We need to get the financials in order," he said, "and we have to present ourself as the most incredible donation opportunity in the Boston area."

Once that is settled, Von Ahn said, the goal will be to implement new programs and initiatives for individuals and families served by Cushing. "You have to in some ways treat a nonprofit just like any other business," he said. "We must reinvent ourselves every day and be the best at what we do."

In his previous position, Von Ahn oversaw a merger of an agency he was running (Warren & Washington Counties Arc) with a larger organization (Albany Arc) that was experiencing serious financial difficulty. The result was a \$40 million chapter of New York State Arc with 950 employees providing services to more than 1,000 individuals with developmental disabilities. He believes that experience will benefit him in his new position.

"Within a year or so we will be on track financially to be where need to be,"

A Kingston, N.Y., native Von Ahn earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at SUNY-Albany and a law degree from the Albany Law School of Union University. He worked in financial services for 11 years before becoming general counsel for New York State Arc. He took over as executive director at Warren & Washington Counties Arc in 2007, and the merger with the Albany chapter was executed in 2013.

"I never expected to be in this field," he said.

A diehard Mets fan, Von Ahn was in college during the 1986 World Series and actually had tickets to the infamous Game 6 (think Bill Buckner) at



Cushing students, from left, Lukas Nedeau, Raghavi Ramanan and Hannah Delorey are excited about the arrival of new CEO John Von Ahn.

Shea Stadium, but never made it, after a football game he attended at the Meadowlands ran late. And, yes, he finds it ironic that he has relocated to a region that was so psychologically scarred by that game and the inevitable Red Sox follow-up collapse in Game 7.

Von Ahn is an avid tournament poker player who closely follows Supreme Court arguments, especially cases dealing with disability. His wife, Christine Carpenter, works for the State of New York.



You can help us open more doors by giving to **The Opportunity Fund** today.

> **Donate** online at www.CushingCenters.org or use the enclosed reply envelope.

PERFECT MATCH

Julie Ellis is a special member of Sullivan Tire family

By Paul Halloran

Paul Sullivan has always considered the company his father founded to be as much a family as a business, so when he says that Julie Ellis is "truly part of the Sullivan Tire family," you know she must be something special.

Julie, who lives in a Cardinal Cushing Centers residence in Scituate and receives employment supports from Cushing, has been working at Sullivan Tire and Auto Service's Norwell headquarters for about three years. She works one day a week doing filing, shredding and other administrative tasks, but Sullivan, the vice president of marketing and business development, said her real strength might be in event planning.

"Julie drums up excitement a month in advance, whether it's Halloween, Christmas or celebrating another sports championship," he said. "She is very authentic; there's something about her that touches people."

Ellis, who was a student at Cushing before graduating to adult services, said she loves her job because of the people she works with, including Sullivan, Maureen Cullity, Stephanie Calhoun and Tara Fellmeth.

"I love all the people here," she said. "The job is wonderful."

She also subscribes to the no-job-too-small

philosophy.

"Any time we need anything done, she will raise her hand," said Sullivan, a longtime Cushing supporter who first met Ellis four years ago when she was a cheerleader at Cushing. "You just want to reach out and say, 'How can I help you navigate life?' Cushing does a wonderful job providing the resources and the tools for people; businesses have to help them use those tools."

Sullivan said the gratification he and his staff get from having Ellis work there is immeasurable.

"It's the attention you give them and making them feel part of something special. All businesses should experience working with someone like Julie," he said.

Cullity, with whom Ellis works directly, said she is a valued member of the Sullivan team.

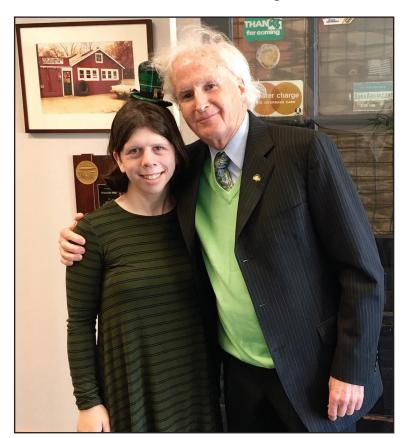
"Julie comes in and is always very upbeat and happy," Cullity said. "She is happy to come in and do her job."

Sullivan said Ellis receives an annual review, like all of Sullivan's 1,500 employees. Hers is delivered over breakfast at Strawberry Fair restaurant.

"She usually comes away smiling and satisfied," he said.

She's not the only one.

"We don't feel we are doing anything that we wouldn't want done for one of our own," Sullivan said. "We love having Julie work with us."



Paul Sullivan says Julie Ellis is a valued employee at Sullivan Tire and Auto Service.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE



Luke and Karen Dillon

Spreading joy brings joy

By Meaghan Casey

For nearly 20 years, Luke and Karen Dillon have been putting smiles on the faces of countless Cushing students — at a time when they often need it most.

The Dillons, who lived in Hanover for many years before moving to Dorchester's Lower Mills neighborhood, became involved with Cushing on a volunteer basis through the religious education program at St. Mary's in Hanover. One year, prior to Christmas, they found out that many student residents were not able to travel home for the holidays. That set the wheels in motion for the first of 19 Christmas parties that the Dillons and friends have organized over the years.

"We saw a need where we could help and it's carried on," said Luke. "It started out very informally. We raised some money and shopped for gifts — toys, electronics, clothes, hats and gloves and more. Since then, we've developed a formula where we meet in October and split up a shopping list. Then we'll get together in December and wrap the gifts and bring everything over to Cushing."

"We love this tradition and we have so much fun as a group figuring out the gifts and then doing the shopping," said Karen.

The group raises money through private donations and small fundraising events.

"There are so many generous people and businesses in this community," said Luke. "When

they donate and then come to volunteer at the party, it's such a moving experience."

The party is usually held on the Friday before Christmas. In addition to bringing gifts, the volunteers also decorate the dining room of Cushing's culinary center and serve popcorn, pizza and ice cream sundaes. Students join in trimming the Christmas tree, and Steve MacDonald, a middle school music teacher in Weymouth, plays the guitar and leads them in singing carols and dancing the limbo. The event is capped off by a visit from Santa who distributes the gifts. Usually about 35 to 40 Cushing students are in attendance. Recognizing that Cushing staff members work so hard all year, each staff person at the party is also given a present.

"It's become part of our Christmas," Luke said.
"Our son, Chris, has been doing it with us since he was 6 and it's something we really look forward to."

In addition to the Dillons and MacDonald, other recurrent volunteers have included the Cass, Gardner, Hayes, Hohenleitner, Mahoney, Marchetti, Miller and Polizio families of Hanover.

"It's an extraordinary gift to our students," said Tom McElman, Cushing's Director of Recreation and Community Programs. "We thank them for their unending friendship."

In addition to their work with the Christmas party, the Dillons also support Cushing by attending the annual Springtime fundraising event. "We feel very strongly about the good work they do," said Luke. 4 — Cardinal Cushing Centers Connector SPRING 2019 Cardinal Cushing Centers Connector SPRING 2019 — 5

Seeing green

By Meaghan Casey

ardinal Cushing Centers' Greenhouse has gotten some much needed enrichment thanks to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Last spring, Cushing was selected as a recipient of Blue Cross' Healthy Living Community Grant in the amount of \$5,000. Blue Cross awards nonprofit organizations that promote healthy living by providing access and education to healthy food, physical fitness, and/or healthy environments. Out of 92 applicants, Cushing was one of 29 recipients during the first round of grants in

"These organizations already have successful track records, and with our funding support, they will be able to serve even more Massachusetts residents," said Jeff Bellows, Blue Cross Vice President of Corporate Citizenship and Public Affairs.

At Cushing, the funds have been used to purchase the necessary equipment, including a gas-powered leaf blower and industrial hoses, to expand the Greenhouse's vegetable garden.

Cushing's Greenhouse instructor Derek Nelson says the vegetable garden is helping to increase healthy and nutritious food items in the culinary center and the Bass Café, and increase students' awareness of and access to whole and nutritious foods. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes that individuals with disabilities can be more prone to suffer from preventable health problems, so it is important for them to develop lifelong healthy living habits. Nelson enjoys teaching his students the difference between processed food and farm-to-table food and instilling in them the joy of growing their own food.

"During the growing season, we work with students across our vocational program on



healthy ways to prepare the produce," he said. "With a larger garden and more plum tomatoes, the Café and our culinary department are able to produce robust quantities of healthy food menu items — a classic example of farm-to-table

Cushing's vocational students have been involved with every step of the process — from replenishing and restoring the garden topsoil to weeding, watering and harvesting. Some of the produce they have been able to introduce have been watermelons, cantaloupes and gourds, and the overall growth volume for all of plantings has increased. New this spring, they will plant a variety of potatoes, squash and pumpkins. In the fall, a hydroponic lettuce program will be introduced, leading to the production of Bibb lettuce for consumption during the winter

"Our program becomes more environmentally sound as we grow new products and decrease our reliance on outside food sources, with an emphasis on an organic, natural growing process and products," said Nelson.

"It's been one of the standout programs," said Meghan Driscoll, Senior Specialist, Corporate Citizenship at Blue Cross. "I like that it's had an educational component, helping participants to incorporate healthy eating in their lives."

The expansion has also allowed Cushing to produce more vegetables for public sale. That revenue will contribute to financial maintenance, allowing the garden to be a selfsustaining program.

"It was a great investment on our part because it felt like we were just moving the needle," said Driscoll.

As part of the award package, Cushing was designated a member of Blue Cross' Healthy Living Network, which was created as a way to deepen the company's relationships with nonprofit partners and provide more opportunities to try new ideas and share best practices. In addition to funding, Healthy Living Network members have access to workshops and events where they can share successes and challenges with their peers and participate in skills-based training.

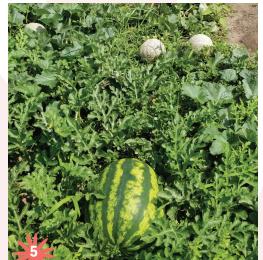
"As a corporate partner we aim to provide more than financial support," said Yvonne Tang, Blue Cross Director of Community Investments. "Our Healthy Living Network is able to convene nonprofit leaders to spark meaningful dialogue and encourage collaboration."



















- 1. The \$5,000 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield will help Cardinal Cushing Centers to continue to promote healthy living through vegetables and fruits
- 2. Avocado seeds are planted and covered in plastic cups to protect them from
- 3. Jake Santos takes care of the soil at Cushing Greenhouse.
- 4. Patrick Mulgrew rakes the ground outside of the Greenhouse.

- 5-6. Watermelon and flowers are among the items grown at the Greenhouse.
 7. Patrick Mulgrew empties out used coffee pods so that the grounds can be used for the soil.
- 8. Tyler Ferguson shows off a geranium arrangement.
- 9. The Cardinal Cushing Centers Greenhouse is open for business.

PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE



Cushing Art Director Randy Wiskow, far right, received the Light of Dawnn Award along with Alma Huerta Dominguez, far left, and Ketsy Caraballo. The awards were presented by Dawnn Jaffier's brother, lan Jaffier Jr., and father, lan Jaffier Sr.

Wiskow is a shining light at Cushing

Randy Wiskow, Cushing's art director, was honored on Feb. 26 as one of three Light of Dawnn Award recipients.

Wiskow, who develops the art curricula and provides instruction for all 115 Cushing students, says he likes to "create an environment that allows students to achieve their highest level of success through challenging, innovative art."

The Light of Dawnn Awards were created to honor the legacy of Boston youth leader Dawnn Jaffier, who was tragically killed in an act of senseless gun violence. Each year, a selection committee honors three individuals who share Dawnn's passion and emulate her dedication to service. In addition to Wiskow, the two other 2019 Light of Dawnn Award winners were Ketsy Caraballo of Health Care Without Walls and Alma Huerta Dominguez of Boston Area Rape Crisis Center. The ceremony was organized by the Highland Street Foundation, John Hancock Financial, the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network, and the West End House Boys and Girls Club.





Honoring Claudia Sorgi and **Douglas Briggs** Franciscan Leadership Award **Rockland Trust** Richard Cardinal **Cushing Award**



The second annual Paddle for a Purpose was held on March 2 at Black Rock Country Club and Cohasset Golf Club. More than \$18,000 was raised from the charity paddle tournament, which supports Cushing's Opportunity Fund.

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Ralph's Wine Jason Ronan Row and Ride Sapa Mary St. Sauveur The Bar Method Tosca Trish Hart Yoga Viking Paddles Sara Warwick

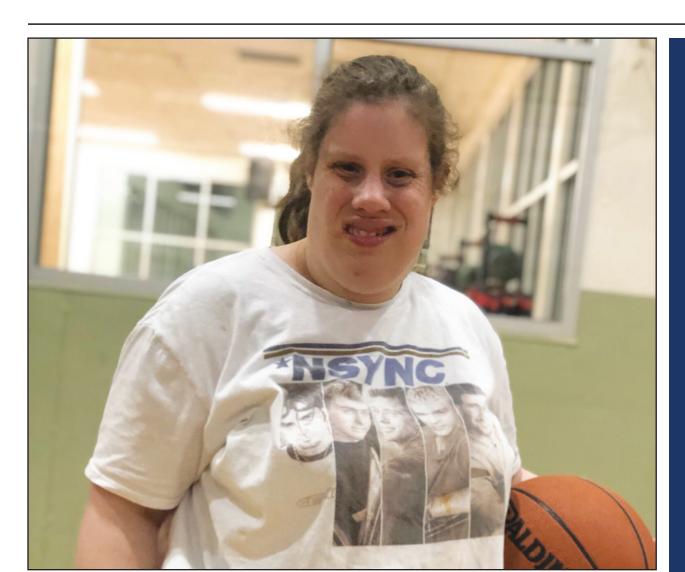
Amber Waterhouse

YMCA Hanover



The Cardinal Cushing Centers Boston Marathon team is hard at work preparing for their big day. This year's team includes Julian Concannon, a former occupational therapist at Cushing; Emily Kacynski, music teacher who works closely with students with autism; Brian Lawlor, whose friend is a residential student at Cushing; Richard Mueller, a Wisconsin resident who is board chair of another organization sponsored by the Sisters of Saint Francis of Assisi; Erin O'Connell, whose sister is a residential student at Cushing; and Chrissy Raymond, whose sister is part of the ACE program at Cushing. Please consider donating today to help them reach their team goal of \$75,000. I 00% of your donation directly impacts our programs.





Casey Gibbons is an active member of the Hanover YMCA through Pathways to Friendship.

FRIENDSHIP GOALS

Cushing participants expand their social circles

By Meaghan Casey

Earlier this year, Casey Gibbons wouldn't have expected to be offering up music tips to her Zumba teacher at the Hanover YMCA, and Nathan Smith wouldn't have dreamed of dancing the foxtrot at the Arthur Murray dance studio in Weymouth. But that's just what they're doing thanks to Pathways to Friendship.

Pathways to Friendship is a collaborative initiative on social inclusion between the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), The Arc of Massachusetts and several organizations providing residential supports to persons served by DDS. It is aimed at bringing people with and without disabilities together. The initiative launched in 2017 as an extension of the Arc's Widening the Circle program.

"It's a way to facilitate introductions outside of the immediate circle of family and service providers," said Jim Ross, Director of Widening the Circle. "It promotes more integration, inclusion and community involvement."

There are 28 agencies across the state that are involved with Pathways to Friendship and receiving training and consultation. Each has committed to advancing inclusion and tracking progress. Cushing was selected as a partner in 2018 and will participate through 2020. Donna Hibbert, Cushing's Director of Clinical Services for Adult Services, is coordinating the efforts at Cushing. She meets regularly with Ross and has been tapping into resources in the community to find new social outlets for Cushing's six participants – some of whom are Cushing residents, and some who already live in the community. Each are able to apply for grants up to \$1,000 to help out with classes,

membership fees and more.

Casey, who lives in Hanover, has been a member of the Hanover YMCA for more than two months. She goes at least three times a week for fitness classes, basketball and swimming. At Cushing, she is also on the Special Olympics basketball team, but this is a new chance for her to meet other gym members.

"She's really enjoying it, and I think there's a real opportunity for her to make a connection there," said Hibbert.

Nathan, a Whitman resident who had recently performed a choreographed dance with his girlfriend, was inspired to try ballroom dancing. He went for an initial assessment at Arthur Murray, was accepted and is attending one class each week there.

"It's really interesting to watch them assimilate to the environments they're in," said Hibbert. "It's also opening doors for them because if they're comfortable out in the community, they're more likely to rise to the occasion for employment and other opportunities."

The other four Cushing participants have also expressed interest or gotten involved with local gyms, art classes, a men's poker league and karate classes.

"A residual effect is that it's breaking down stereotypes and allowing other individuals to look at them for their abilities rather than their disabilities," said Hibbert.

And that's just what Ross hopes is one of the outcomes. "The most encouraging thing about this work is that it's not just important to the person with a disability, but to their new friends as well," he said. "The whole idea is reciprocity and building real friendships."

BOARD PROFILE



Paul Kiley

For Kiley, Cushing is a wise investment

By Paul Halloran

Paul Kiley was looking for the right volunteer opportunity and he was familiar with Cardinal Cushing Centers, having grown up in nearby Norwell, so when a good friend recruited him for the Cushing board of directors, he jumped at the chance.

Almost 15 years later, Kiley remains on the board and as committed as ever to helping Cushing carry out its mission of being a place where people of all ages and abilities find possibility, opportunity and hope.

"Cushing was a place I knew about from growing up in the area," said Kiley, who served as board chair from 2016-17. "I knew about the good work that was being done. It felt like it was meant to be."

Kiley, a partner in Risk Advisory Services at RSM US LLP, said serving on the board has been a fulfilling experience.

"Once I got in there and got to know the great people working there, I was humbled by the work these folks are doing day in and day out," Kiley said. "I wanted to help as much as I could."

Kiley said while he could draw satisfaction from working with any nonprofit, serving Cushing brings an extra level of gratification.

"They're helping people who can't always help themselves and in the past may have been forgotten by society," he said. "The difference Cushing can make in people's lives is tangible – people who might not have had as much opportunity to live a fulfilling life without these services. They can have jobs and live somewhat independently."

Kiley thinks his desire to give back was nurtured at BC High, where he was exposed to the Ignatian value of being men for others. He graduated from UMass Amherst with an accounting degree. A CPA, he has spent his entire career in the world of finance. He joined RSM 15 years ago and has been a partner for four years.

Kiley and his wife, Kristine, live in Plymouth and have two daughters: Anna, who is in college, and Kaitlin, a senior in high school. When he is not working or helping out at Cushing, Kiley likes to run, sail and ski.

AT HOME IN HANOVER

BETHANY APARTMENTS A COMMUNITY FOR ALL

By Meaghan Casey

When Ugonna Onyekwu and his wife, Traci, were about to welcome their little girl into the world, they knew it was time to find a space that would meet the needs of their growing family of four.

They found that in the Bethany
Apartments in Hanover, which neighbors
Cushing. The apartment complex was
built to be a place where people with and
without disabilities live, learn, work and
socialize together. It is managed by Peabody
Properties and, as the one-year anniversary
of its opening approaches, is completely
occupied, with a wait list for applicants.

The project is a result of years of planning, collaboration and hard work. Cushing partnered with the Planning Office for Urban Affairs – the nonprofit housing developer affiliated with the Archdiocese of Boston – to convert the former administrative building into 37 rental units of affordable workforce housing. Several hundred applications were submitted, and residents were selected via lottery. The first residents moved in last June, and the Onyekwus made their move in July. They moved from East Weymouth, where they had been living for about five years before starting the search for extra square footage. At Bethany, they live in a two-bedroom apartment with their daughter, Logan, who was born in October, and son, Terrance Jr. (TJ) —Traci's son and Ugonna's stepson - who is 11 and divides his time between Boston and Hanover.

"It's the perfect space for us," said Onyekwu.

Onyekwu has enjoyed living so close to Cushing, and using the facilities from time to time. He's taken some runs on the track and along the trails, and has had great interactions with his neighbors, as well as the students and residents of Cushing. He also feels immersed in the Hanover community at large.

"Even from our first visit, the area seemed quaint and really friendly," said Onyekwu. "It's been an easy transition for myself and my family."

Onyekwu works in compliance at Delta Dental of Massachusetts' headquarters in Charlestown. He drives an hour to Quincy, parks and takes the train to Charlestown.

"I tell my friends in the city to come down to the South Shore," said Onyekwu, who grew up in Dorchester, while Traci is from Roxbury. "It was a great decision."









Top, Ugonna Onyekwu holds up his daughter, Logan.

Far left, Onyekwu and his wife, Traci, walk down the hallways of the Bethany Apartments with their daughter.

The Bethany Apartments, above, have been occupied since the summer.

Near left, older brother TJ enjoys some quality time with Logan.

PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE