

# YOUR LIFE



RICHARD HERTZLER / NEW ERA

Members of the United Disabilities Services Adult Enrichment Program recently scripted and performed "Enjoy the Ride: Living with Disabilities," a musical production designed to educate about disabilities.

## Enjoy the ride

### Program serving people with disabilities provides education through staged production

*The only disability in life is a bad attitude.*  
— Scott Hamilton

By **SUSAN JURGELSKI**  
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**I**NSIDE THIS STAGED TRAIN, chugging into the future, the actors playing passengers — who also happen to share some form of disability — convey a simple philosophy. "Enjoy the Ride."

After all, it's the ride of your life.

In "Enjoy the Ride: Living with Disabilities," a musical production scripted and performed by members of the United Disabilities Services Adult Enrichment Program, enlightenment takes center stage.

Three performances of the show were recently held at First Presbyterian Church, East Orange Street, Lancaster.

"Our goal was to enlighten and educate our audience about living with a



ANNETTE WHITLOCK

With the help of United Disabilities Services Adult Enrichment Program manager Nannette Longenecker, Colin Sellard, who has cerebral palsy, helped paint scenery for the program's production, "Enjoy the Ride."

disability, for understanding leads to compassion," show director Annette Whitlock writes in the production program. "Compassion leads to service. Service then leads to friendship."

The show spotlight was also on acceptance and perseverance — and maintaining a sense of humor.

Whitlock's son, Jonathan, who suffered a brain injury in an accident a decade ago, borrows a phrase from a poem written by his uncle.

"Quitting has its season, but it's not in the air today."

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In the 1960s, a woman with cerebral palsy wanted to attend a downtown theater.

But it wasn't accessible.

"She went to her pastor and said, 'Something's wrong with this,'" says Jerry Meck, CEO of UDS. "He said, 'You're right.'"

They ultimately started a recreational program for people with cerebral palsy.

In some ways, that was a spring-

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## Program

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board for UDS, formerly United Cerebral Palsy of Lancaster County, and what is today the Adult Enrichment Program.

Serving people with a broad range of disabilities, the program meets for six to eight hours daily — although not all participants come every day.

There are now 20 participants, ranging in age from 20 to mid-60s.

"Some of these folks have been dedicated to (the program) for a long time," says Bill Kepner, UDS senior vice president and chief operating officer.

Although budget cuts are a reality in today's economic climate, Kepner says UDS is invested in maintaining the enrichment program and nurturing its expansion.

Funding comes from a variety of sources, including federal and state monies and Lancaster County Mental Health/Mental Retardation. Cost for people who pay privately is \$11 an hour.

"(The program) mission statement, which was written by (participants), is (for them) to find, focus and use their gifts and talents out in the community," says Nannette Longenecker, program manager.

The program incorporates art — some members have displayed and been awarded for their work — music, outings and a diversity of activities, such as cooking and history lessons.

"They tell us what they want, and we provide it," Longenecker says.

It's a chance for participants to learn new skills or expand on existing ones.

"There was a gal who knitted that was stuck knitting the same sweater over and over again," Longenecker says. "She wanted to learn new ways to knit, so we got her an advanced knitting instructor, and she was able to move forward."

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Theater isn't new to the

members of the Adult Enrichment Program.

They have staged productions in the past.

But this is the first year the show has been written by program members and addresses disabilities, director Whitlock says.

Program members voted on a train theme, revolving around the idea of life being a journey.

"I asked them key questions, like what it's like being in their situation ... what it's like having a disability ... being in a wheelchair ... how do they deal with the frustrations, their dreams and aspirations," she says.

"It was tough for them. They don't talk about their disability. It's just life for them."

The script evolved from the participants' answers.

Music, including the Beatles song "Let It Be," was integrated into the production.

Program members like Colin Sellard, who has cerebral palsy, worked on scenery. To help paint the backdrop, Sellard, who has limited movement, used a paintbrush attached to headgear.

Program members try to view challenges as opportunities.

"I get frustrated, but I just keep plugging away at it," Jonathan Whitlock says.

Although he has lost movement on his left side, the left-hander is still painting and fine-tuning his guitar- and piano-playing skills.

During the performance, he also sang a song that he helped write before his accident.

"If you believe, you can achieve," program member Larry Sills says.

For Whitlock, the journey as a director has been worth the trip.

"It's been a great ride," she says. "Really amazing."

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