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**Award Ceremony to Recognize Contributions to Disability Community**

*Governor's Council on People with Disabilities Awards to include Employer and Legislator of the Year Awards.*

**COLUMBUS, OH** –The Governor's Council on People with Disabilities (GCPD) will hold its annual awards ceremony at the Ohio Statehouse on Thursday, October 16, recognizing significant contributions to the disability community. Award winners will include:

**Employer of the Year:** The Kroger Company and AMC Theater - West Chester 18

**Advocacy Award:** LC in Aktion; Best Buddies and Miami University

**Accessible Parking Enforcement Award:** Hocking College Police Department

**Accessible Medical Services Award:** Richard Braun, Chief, Cincinnati Fire Department

**Maureen Fitzgerald Leadership Award:** Maradythe Stern

**Karla Lortz Scholarship:** Austin White

**Legislator of the Year:** Representative Fred Strahorn (D-Dayton) and  
Senator Kevin Bacon (R-Minerva Park)

“The annual awards ceremony is always one of my favorite events of the year,” said Matthew Sauer Ph.D., GCPD Chair. “It is a pleasure to be able to recognize a great group of organizations and individuals who have made a real difference in people’s lives.”

Rachel Barezinsky, a former GCPD Youth Leadership Forum participant, will serve as the keynote speaker for the event highlighting her experiences and involvement with GCPD. In 2006 Barezinsky was the victim of a gunshot wound to the head causing severe, penetrating traumatic brain injury. She miraculously survived but has undergone years of therapy, and multiple surgeries, to recover from the physical and cognitive complications that resulted from the injury.

GCPD accepts nominations for the awards throughout the year then selects the winners for the October event. The Council seeks to recognize the individuals and organizations for their service but also to inspire and encourage others to emphasize ability rather than disability as the important factor in employment, promotion, and advancement; to explore innovative and progressive methods of improving the quality of lives for Ohio residents with disabilities.

The Governor's Council on People with Disabilities (GCPD) serves as an advisory council for the Governor and General Assembly on statewide disability issues. The Council strives to promote the value of diversity, dignity and the quality of life for people with disabilities by: seeking out and advocating for, partnerships at the local, state and national level; promoting equality of access and independence; fostering the development of employment opportunities. Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) provide staff and office support for the Governor's Council on People with Disabilities.

*OOD is the state agency responsible for assisting individuals with disabilities to live independently, gain meaningful employment or receive disability benefits through the Social Security Administration. [www.ood.ohio.gov](http://www.ood.ohio.gov)*