

# Supervisor Mark Lesko and Town Board Members Celebrate Autism Awareness Month at "Light it up Blue" Event

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*Pictured left to right are Supervisor Mark Lesko, FREE Players Program Director Jim Sisto, musical performer Sarah Turkiew, Diane Cahill, Autism Coalition of Long Island, Councilman Daniel Panico, Councilwoman Constance Kepert, and Deputy Supervisor / Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh*



*Supervisor Lesko (left) with Members of the FREE Players Platinum Explosion Jazz Ensemble and musical performer Sarah Turkiew*



*The FREE Players Platinum Explosion Jazz Ensemble performing during the Light It Up Blue ceremony.*

**Farmingville, NY** - On April 28, Supervisor Mark Lesko, Deputy Supervisor / Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh, Councilman Dan Panico and Councilwoman Connie Kepert joined the Autism Coalition of Long Island and other Autism advocacy and education organizations at Town Hall for the "Light it up Blue" event in recognition of Autism Awareness Month.

The "Light It Up Blue" event began with a session that included a number of tables staffed by members of Autism organizations who provided information and resource materials to those in attendance. The ceremony started with Supervisor Mark Lesko addressing the audience and then counting down to illuminate the Town Hall Auditorium in blue light.

"Light It Up Blue gives everyone the opportunity to recognize how autism affects the lives of so many of our friends, neighbors and families," said Supervisor Lesko. "It also brings to light a better understanding that those who have autism can rise to great levels as we saw in the musical performances tonight. I thank those who organized this event and look forward to doing it again next year."

The event also featured comments by Diane Cahill of the Autism Coalition of Long Island and two parents with autistic children, Joan Hempton and Kevin Ray, both from Shirley, who shared their struggles and triumphs with the audience. The evening's entertainment was provided by Family Residences and Essential Enterprises (FREE) Players Platinum Explosion Jazz Ensemble who presented three remarkable vocal performances and by Sarah Turkiew, a Long Island autism advocate who is also an individual with autism. Ms. Turkiew sang a stirring rendition of the National Anthem to open the ceremony and also played a jazz piece on the saxophone later in the program.

"Light It Up Blue was such a wonderful event and I was honored to have the opportunity to participate," said Deputy Supervisor / Councilwoman Walsh. "Autism affects one in every 110 children, so it's important to have events like this to help educate and get the message out that there are support groups that are ready to help those in need."

Councilwoman Connie Kepert said, "As a special education teacher I am well aware of both the unique challenges that confront autistic children, as well as, their enormous potential. This tremendous potential and the many difficult challenges were recently portrayed in a recent movie entitled Temple Grandin. Due to the advocacy of many parents and organizations like the Long Island Autism Coalition, opportunities for autistic children and adults will continue to multiply."

"Events like Light It Up Blue serve to raise the awareness of autism in our communities," commented Brookhaven Town Councilman Panico, "What is important is to let people know that there is a network of assistance and help available for families and friends to help as well as highlight the talents and abilities of people who have autism. The performances given that night were first rate and made everyone extremely proud."

**Division of Public Information \* Office of the Supervisor**

One Independence Hill • Farmingville • NY 11738 • Phone (631) 451-6595 • Fax (631) 451-6258