Board welcomes new Superintendent

The Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (MCBDDS) welcomed Pamela Combs as its new Superintendent June 10. Combs succeeds Nancy Banks, who retired June 28 after five years heading the agency.

Combs recently served as Superintendent of the Gallia County Board of Developmental Disabilities in southeastern Ohio. Her accomplishments there included expanding housing options for people with developmental disabilities by founding a non-profit housing corporation and purchasing homes to support individuals’ integration into the local community. She also oversaw the privatization of the Board’s adult day services program per federal mandates, and the closure of a 33-bed Intermediate Care Facility.

During her tenure, the Gallia County Board received a three-year accreditation from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, and voters approved an additional one mill continuing levy. In addition to her work with Gallia County, Combs’ experience includes service as Director of Provider Relations for the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities, and as Deputy Director of Information System Services for the Franklin County Job and Family Services agency, where she also served as a management analyst.

Combs is scheduled to receive an Ed.D. in Leadership and Innovation from St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens, Fla., in 2019. She completed a two-year post-master’s certificate in Disabilities and Community Inclusion from Kent State University in 2016, and earned a Master of Science from the University of North Texas in Organizational Communication where she served as a graduate teaching fellow. She also earned a Master of Divinity with a focus on Ethics and Hermeneutics (the interpretation of Biblical texts) from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and served as its first female Student Body president. Her undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from Eastern Kentucky University.

“Pamela has demonstrated a deep commitment to serving people with developmental disabilities throughout her career,” said MCBDDS Board President Madeleine Iseli. “She is a strong leader, and the Board looks forward to working with her.”

For more information about Pamela, please see page 4.
The Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services held a special recognition event Friday, June 21 to honor direct care staff and others who kept people safe during the Memorial Day 2019 tornadoes.

This event, called “Celebrating Disaster Heroes,” drew residential provider staff and leadership, elected officials, Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities Director Jeff Davis, Ohio Provider Resource Association Executive Director Pete Moore, community members and local television news meteorologists Jamie Simpson (WRGT-TV/WKEF-TV), McCall Vrydaghs (WHIO-TV) and Brian Davis (WDTN-TV).

Outgoing MCBDDS Superintendent Nancy Banks served as emcee for the event, and invited both Davis and Moore to speak. Davis, who is a member of Governor Mike DeWine’s cabinet, and Moore praised the direct care staff in the audience and those DSPs unable to attend for their dedication and heroic actions during the tornadoes.

Banks then called the meteorologists forward, and thanked them for ensuring that people received information about the tornadoes’ location and direction in time to make life-saving decisions. The three received a heartfelt standing ovation from those in attendance.

The Board also showed a video called “What is a Hero?”, which featured interviews with local direct support professionals whose split-second decisions saved the lives of the people they serve. This video can be found on the Montgomery County Board’s YouTube channel.

Last and most importantly, Banks called residential provider agency leaders forward and invited them to recognize their staff heroes. This segment of the program was especially moving, as the direct support professionals who led people to safety during the tornadoes were recognized, and their stories shared. Each DSP later received a personalized, signed proclamation from Governor Mike DeWine and Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted, thanking them for extraordinary service.

“...The things you did that night, and the calmness and self-sacrifice you did them with, are inspiring to all of us. They are nothing short of heroic.”

- Ohio DODD Director Jeff Davis, speaking to DSPs
As tornadoes bore down on Brookville, Trotwood and other Montgomery County communities the night of Memorial Day, MCBDDS and Miami Valley In-Ovations (MVIO) staff knew that many of the people they served would be in danger. That’s why, in the hours immediately after, they acted quickly to determine the safety and whereabouts of every person with developmental disabilities who receives services from the County.

SSAs and other MCBDDS staff went into the affected communities, searching for missing individuals with developmental disabilities who did not have family supports. They physically relocated some of the individuals whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the storms, along with providers, and coordinated a variety of services for those affected, including:

- Providing and maintaining generators
- Coordinating and/or delivering food and water
- Salvaging and moving appliances and furniture from damaged properties
- Daily monitoring of vacant properties to discourage property damage and looting
- Offering support to provider agencies that serve people with developmental disabilities
- Facilitating the lease of temporary housing for individuals receiving services and for provider agencies serving people with developmental disabilities
- Coordinating and carrying out cleanup efforts at properties of people served
- Providing mental health supports and services to people traumatized
- Communicating about disaster relief and recovery resources

In total, **179 individuals who receive services** from the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities were directly affected by the Memorial Day tornadoes, and 60 of those resided in properties that sustained damage.
Get to know our new Superintendent

Pamela Combs brings a unique perspective to MCBDDS, as she has worked for a number of County Boards during her career, along with other government agencies and private companies. We asked her a few questions about what led her to our county. Her responses follow.

What attracted you to the Montgomery County Board Superintendent position?

I’ve known since college that I wanted to make a difference in the world. During my career, I realized that I wanted to make that difference through human services — helping people who are often underserved, and doing so through leadership and direction of local governments.

I also wanted to work with a county that is willing to push the boundaries and do more than is mandated, and the Montgomery County Board has done some things that are unique in government work. Its Mental Health and Recreation Services offerings, and its Brighter Tomorrow Foundation, are unique to County Boards of DD in Ohio.

What do you hope to accomplish in your new role?

I plan to continue the great work that the Montgomery County Board has been doing. And I hope to lead us toward new benchmarks and even greater opportunities for services and supports for people with developmental disabilities. I also enjoy and embrace community collaboration, and working in teams and partnerships, and look forward to doing that not only in Montgomery County but within the state.

How do you expect your job to be different here?

Montgomery County has many resources and many challenges, and I’m looking forward to working alongside the professionals and leaders in the county to make a positive difference. I plan to approach the job by immersing myself in the culture, and learning about the agency’s history, policies, procedures and routines. I’ll also work to understand the challenges the Board faces so I can best address them.

One of my priorities is meeting with the directors of our departments and our staff, the people we serve, and their family members and guardians. I also look forward to getting to know local providers and government and community leaders.

What has been your experience working with independent and agency providers?

I’ve worked as a Director of Provider Relations for a County Board, and have a strong relationship with providers as a result. I also understand quality, financial needs, business plans and outcomes. In working with providers, my goal is to support and assist them to achieve all that they can, for the stronger they are, the more they will be able to deliver quality services to those who need them.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I’m a coach. I encourage, give a lot of feedback and direction, and listen to ideas. I’m always interested in collaboration, discussion, and brainstorming, but also see myself as a servant leader.

I believe as superintendent it is my job to serve people with developmental disabilities in Montgomery County, as well as their families, the staff and other stakeholders, and to provide the direction and leadership needed to achieve fantastic outcomes and results.

I truly love working with people with developmental disabilities, and feel honored to serve their families and the community. As a parent, I’ve been in a delivery room and heard a doctor say, “There’s something wrong with your child.” I know how that feels, and the challenge of finding resources, and figuring out what to do next.
Self-Advocacy Conference introduces people to provider rating system, remote supports

Hundreds of people turned out for the Montgomery and Greene County Boards’ third annual Self-Advocacy Conference at Wright State University in March.

Members of the two Boards’ self-advocacy groups kicked off the event with a presentation about the basics of self advocacy. Presenters engaged the audience and kept the session lively by involving participants through a series of questions.

The self advocates were later joined onstage by several officers from the Beavercreek Police Department, who worked with the advocates to make a presentation about safety in the community.

Participants also learned how to rate their day, employment, residential and transportation providers using the Provider Guide Plus online tool, and had the opportunity to use onsite computers to do so.

At the end of the Conference, participants learned about assistive technology options and remote supports, and how they help people with developmental disabilities achieve greater independence. Attendees were also able to meet Remote Support providers afterward to ask questions and gather more information.

Provider Guide Plus: Have you rated YOUR provider?

Last summer, Ohio rolled out a new online tool to help people evaluate and rate private providers of agency services. This tool, called ProviderGuidePlus, displays information about — and reviews of — certified agency day, employment, residential and transportation service providers operating in Ohio.

Individuals and family members of individuals who want to rate and review providers can do so by visiting www.providerguideplus.com. They can rate providers based on a 5-star scale, and these stars, along with comments written and submitted, are visible to viewers. People who submit reviews are not required to share their names.

After a review is posted, providers have the opportunity to respond to it.

If you haven’t made time to submit a review, the state encourages you to do so now. Remember: Positive reviews are as helpful as critical ones to people searching for a new provider.
15 honored with 2019 DD Hall of Fame and Erin Ritchey Memorial Awards

The Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (MCBDDS) celebrated the accomplishments and contributions of 15 outstanding people Friday, April 26 at its annual Awards Luncheon at The Mandalay Banquet Center. Five individuals were inducted into the Developmental Disabilities Hall of Fame, including:

- Jennilynn Johnson, Advocacy Award
- Brenda Martin, Arts Award
- Dorothy Evans, Employment Award
- Jarrod Lovett, Employment Award
- Shari Cooper, Personal Accomplishment Award

MCBDDS, in conjunction with former Montgomery County Board of DD Superintendent Ken Ritchey, and his wife, Nancy, also recognized 10 people in seven categories with 2019 Erin Ritchey Memorial Awards. Honorees included:

- Kevin Davis, Achievement Award
- Speedway Store #5089, Trotwood, Business Award
- Carolyn Hayes, Carl Day Volunteer Service Award
- Ushers & Greeters of Omega Baptist Church, Carl Day Volunteer Service Award
- Randy Riffle, Challenge Award
- Lauren Fritz, Community Award
- Sinclair Community College Radiology, Technology and Health Sciences Program, Community Award
- Anna Schultz, Erin’s Award
- Linda Cudd, Spirit Award
- Nancy Banks, Spirit Award

The Board would like to acknowledge The Brighter Tomorrow Foundation, which helped underwrite part of the cost of this year’s “Red Carpet”-themed event.

Many thanks to Nancy Wilson of K99.1 FM for serving as the event’s Master of Ceremonies; to James Moon, who entertained guests with his rendition of “This is Me” from The Greatest Showman; and to the Spire Arts Vocational Art Program, which created the beautiful custom decorations for the event.

The Board would also like to thank the models who assisted the award winners onstage, as well as Christina Gluck of Spire Arts and Zontaye Richardson of Theze Dealz, a Thrifty Boutique, for coordinating the models’ participation.
State legislators form caucus to ensure that DD-related issues receive attention

A group of legislators have united to ensure that issues related to developmental disabilities receive attention in both the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate.

Senators Andrew Brenner (R-Powell) and Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) have created a DD Caucus to ensure that legislators understand Ohio’s DD support system. According to a report from the Ohio Association of County Boards (OACB), Ohio’s DD system stakeholders have identified a number of priorities for consideration by the Caucus, including:

- Ensuring service reliability and quality by decreasing caregiver staff turnover
- Encouraging employment opportunities for Ohioans with developmental disabilities
- Supporting programs that help babies and children with developmental delays
- Exploring ways to coordinate assistance for multi-system youth

“As a former special education teacher and advocate for the disability community, I am happy to join my colleague, Senator Brenner, in this new Caucus,” said Antonio. “People who make up the disability community are an important part of the fabric of our society, and we as legislators should do everything we can to work together for shared goals.”

The caucus will accept input from advocacy groups representing people served by Ohio’s DD system and various professional organizations. Current partners include: The Arc of Ohio, Autism Society Central Ohio, Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio, Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, Ohio Self Determination Association, the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence, OACB and the Ohio Provider Resource Association.

Provider Updates

- **Empowered Community Services** opened its newest location in July at 42 South Richards Run, Springboro. [www.pickempowered.com](http://www.pickempowered.com); 513-780-6138.

- **Unity Care Group’s** new day services program will be located at 650 Congress Park Drive in Centerville. The grand opening is expected later this summer. [www.unitycaregroup.org](http://www.unitycaregroup.org); 937-723-6556.

- **ViaQuest** will open a new day services program at 237 South Dixie Drive in Vandalia. They will host an Open House Wednesday, August 7. Check the MCBDDS website, [www.mcbdds.org](http://www.mcbdds.org), for details.

- **All About You** will be closing September 1.
How to help people with DD affected by the tornadoes

One hundred seventy-nine Montgomery County residents with developmental disabilities suffered damage to their homes and personal property in the Memorial Day 2019 tornado outbreak. Many people have reached out to the Montgomery County Board of DD, asking how they can help those affected.

**MCBDDS has established a fund through The Dayton Foundation called “The Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services Emergency Fund 8345” to provide these people with start-up funds for new housing, and to help them replace some of their personal belongings, such as furniture and clothing. The fund will also be used to help them offset some of the unexpected costs from the storms, including hotel fees, spoiled groceries, and more.**

**People can make donations to the fund via credit card or U.S. Mail.** Requests for assistance will be reviewed by Board leadership and disbursed to individuals with the most significant needs. 100 percent of donated funds will go directly to emergency support for people with developmental disabilities unless using a credit card, where a 3 percent fee will be applied to all transactions to cover the cost of processing. Donors will receive a letter from The Dayton Foundation acknowledging their donation as a deductible charitable contribution.

**HOW TO CONTRIBUTE to the MCBDDS Emergency Fund**

To contribute to the Fund via credit card, visit [https://www.mcbdds.org/tornadorelief](https://www.mcbdds.org/tornadorelief) and follow the instructions. To contribute via U.S. Mail, please make your check payable to The Dayton Foundation, and specify in the memo area that your donation is for “MCBDDS Emergency Fund 8345.”