

Our mission is to support *County Boards of MRDD* in providing services and supports to individuals with disabilities.

# OHIO ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY BOARDS

CELEBRATING THE ABILITIES OF OHIO'S 80,000 INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES OF MRDD



## 2009 Officers Are Selected

The *OACB* recently met and elected 2009 officers. Bob Milliken (*Stark County Board of MRDD*) was elected to his second term as president, while Dean Fadel (*Franklin County Board of MRDD*) was elected vice president. Gabe DeSantis (*Richland County Board of MRDD*) was elected secretary, and Rod Standiford (*Lucas County Board of MRDD*) was elected to his second term as treasurer.

“We are fortunate to have people with the leadership qualities of these individuals who serve on our Board,” said Dan Ohler, *OACB* Executive Director.

“We are excited about the challenges and the opportunities these challenges will bring to our membership in the upcoming year.”

The Board of Trustees also said goodbye to two members who were forced to resign due to term limits. Stan Thomas (*Cuyahoga County Board of MRDD*) had served as vice president for many years, while Dr. John Hoyes (*Muskingum County Board of MRDD*) was the immediate past secretary. Both men were given pieces of framed artwork from their respective counties on behalf of the *OACB* Board of Trustees.

Mr. Thomas and Dr. Hoyes were replaced on the Board of Trustees by Diane Roman Fusco of the *Cuyahoga County Board of MRDD* and Steve Bolger of the *Jefferson County Board of MRDD*.



State Representative Jim Zehringer (front row, second from left) spent about an hour with families participating in the Call2Action training in Darke County. Representative Zehringer gave the families ideas on how to contact their legislators and the best way to communicate their issues.

## Families Respond To Call2Action

Two years ago, the *Ohio Association of County Boards of MRDD (OACB)* began a comprehensive program to train parents, family members and self-advocates on how to communicate with their legislators.

This year, with challenging budgetary issues looming, the *OACB* has kicked it up a notch, and is now including legislators at each of its trainings. In addition, five trainings were held statewide in 2007. Already, ten of the 13 scheduled have been completed.

“Only one thing is more powerful and moves a legislator more than a plea from a father,” said Dan Ohler, *OACB* Executive

Director. “And that’s a plea from a mother. We know the best way to reach individual legislators is through constituents in their districts.”

There is still time to get involved. Trainings remain in Medina (Feb. 14), Franklin (Feb. 18), Richland (Feb. 23), Seneca (March 19), and Clark (April 29) counties. In addition, we are in the process of setting up trainings in Shelby and Cuyahoga counties.

For more information or to sign up for a training, contact Linda Oda, *OACB* Director of Communications, at [loda@oacbmrdd.org](mailto:loda@oacbmrdd.org) or 513-218-4851.

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# Challenging Budget Legislators' Focus

By Dan Ohler

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A new calendar year always brings a renewed hope that the upcoming twelve months will be better than the previous twelve months. Many people engage in New Year's Resolutions, many publicly held elected offices change hands, and the daylight hours start to increase. The anticipation for 2009 is especially high as our nation inaugurated a new President who brings a personal charisma not seen in *The White House* for many years.

Last month political leadership changed, not just in Washington, D.C., but also in Columbus, Ohio. Specifically, the Democrat Party gained control of the *Ohio House of Representatives*. Later this month, the 99-member *House* will begin to conduct Committee Hearings on the Governor's budget proposal for FY2010-11. Leaders of both major parties have been warning this will be the most challenging budget in the past half century, and everyone is hoping the American Recovery & Reinvestment Bill of 2009 is passed by the *111<sup>th</sup> United States Congress*, then quickly signed into law by President Obama. If the federal government can help out the banks and the auto industry, certainly they can help states across the nation, right? It is a rhetorical question.

The details of a bill still being deliberated on Capital Hill are not clear. However, it appears that Ohio's *County Boards of MRDD* would benefit from a lower percentage of non-Medicaid expenditures for waiver services as \$87B is being targeted to a minimum 4.8% increase in the Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage (FMAP). States with higher unemployment will see a higher FMAP increase – and unfortunately,

Ohio has high unemployment. The total stimulus package exceeds \$800B dollars! While that money would obviously provide a relief to our members relative to the reductions in State Appropriations the system has suffered over the past twelve months, it would be temporary in nature. At this newsletter's press time, it appeared the package would cover an 18-month period.

Over the next few months, I will be spending time visiting with many of our *County Boards of MRDD* to discuss Board roles and responsibilities, in addition to sharing the latest from the *Statehouse*. When not on the road, I will be talking with legislators about why it is imperative that they make every effort not to take any more state dollars away from Ohio's MRDD service system. With that said, it would be irresponsible of me as the Executive Director of this trade association if I failed to advise every single *County Board of MRDD* to plan for further reductions in the appropriation of state funds to their respective counties.

In January I traveled around the State and listened to constituents who came to hear *Ohio Department of MRDD* Director John Martin talk about the funding crisis and offer their ideas on how to save money and/or redirect funds to services. I came away from those meetings with many thoughts, the most prominent one being that Ohio's



OACB Executive Director Dan Ohler, shown shaking hands with Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, will be attending budget hearings to make certain issues involving the state's 80,000 people with developmental disabilities are heard.

MRDD service system is so strong because of the actions of people at the local level who have been so determined to ensure that it is strong. Now more than ever we must engage our families and advocates. We must listen to them to gain a sense of those things they value above all else, and compel them to step forward and interact with legislators and other elected officials. OACB has been conducting a series of Call2Action advocacy trainings across the State to help our *County Board of MRDD* members accomplish that important objective.

Many may be able to absorb state funding reductions by increasing the number of individuals they serve on waivers, thereby increasing the flow of federal dollars. Others may tap into reserves, restructure their operations or even eliminate non-mandatory pro-

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# Milliken Honored For Dedication And Service To Individuals And Families

In early December, *Stark County Board of MRDD* member Robert Milliken was awarded the 2008 Community Service Award at the annual meeting of the North Coast Community Homes (NCCH) in Cleveland.

NCCH says the award honors organizations or individuals who have contributed to, and are involved with activities that improve the quality of life for individuals with mental retardation, mental illness, and/or other disabilities.

In addition to serving on the *Stark County Board of MRDD* since 2000, Milliken is currently serving as president of the *OACB*. In this position, he meets with Board superintendents and other Board members from across the state, and attends conferences – all as a volunteer. Between volunteer commitments, Milliken owns a real estate in-

vestment and property management company.

Milliken grew up with two older brothers with mental retardation. When *Stark County Board of MRDD*

opened its doors in 1968, Milliken's brothers were two of the first individuals to receive services.

As a child, Milliken describes his older brothers "as a couple of hawks that watched out for me."

However, as Milliken reached adulthood, he became the hawk watching over not only his brothers, but also his aging parents. Milliken made the decision to not become his brothers' primary caregiver, so he began to research other



At the December *OACB* Board meeting, officers for the upcoming year were selected. Shown are *OACB* Executive Director Dan Ohler, Secretary Gabe DeSantis, President Bob Milliken, and Vice President Dean Fadel. Not pictured is Rod Standiford, who was re-elected treasurer.

possibilities, which led to his lifelong passion of helping individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

"One of the most difficult things I experienced as a child was a sense of loneliness, because I didn't know anyone who could relate to me," Milliken said.

*Article reprinted with permission from the Stark County Board of MRDD.*

## Ohler *(From Page 2)*

grams. There might even be a few counties that will be able to raise new local dollars through a levy initiative. None of those things will happen without thoughtful planning, clear communication and precise execution.

As we move forward into 2009, let us keep our eye on the prize. As *County Boards of MRDD* we cannot control what the *United States Congress* will do regarding a federal stimulus package. We can, however, try to influence them. We cannot control what the *Governor* or *General Assembly* will do with state funds. We can, however, try to influence them. In addition, we can "...plan and set priorities based on available resources" (OHIO REVISED CODE Section 5126.04) in an effort to enhance the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities in our respective counties.

Despite our recent struggles, like you, I am proud to be an Ohioan. I am also proud to be a small part of Ohio's MRDD service system, and both humbled and honored to hold the position I do with the *OACB*. I look forward to 2009, and the opportunities it presents for *County Boards of MRDD* to further establish themselves as the bedrock of this service system.



### WE WANT TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOU

The *OACB* currently is updating its Board Member Roster.

Make certain we have your most current communication information by visiting our website at [www.oacbmrdd.org](http://www.oacbmrdd.org) or clicking [here](#).

Questions? Call us at 614-431-0616