MEDIA ADVISORY
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Photos Courtesy of Anderson Center for Autism
Video clip on consulting program also available upon request

PRESS RELEASE
The Village of Rhinebeck on its Way to Becoming First Autism Supportive
Community in Hudson Valley through Collaboration with Anderson Center for Autism

Rhinebeck, New York…Local volunteers, business leaders, and public officials have been collaborating with executives from Anderson Center for Autism to designate the Village of Rhinebeck an Autism Supportive Community, the first of its kind in the Hudson Valley, since November, and today announced pledges from over 30 businesses and organizations who have committed to “Do One Thing” to make the historic village more autism-friendly.

Since the launch of the effort in November 2018, Anderson’s consulting team has worked with the Village of Rhinebeck’s Autism Supportive Community committee to organize and deliver educational sessions designed to help attendees understand how autism presents and what can be done to support the 1 in 59 impacted. In addition, the group has secured individual commitments from a few dozen businesses and organizations in the Village of Rhinebeck. For example, the Rhinebeck Central School District has replaced fluorescent bulbs with softer, quieter LED lighting; Village Pizza and A.L. Stickles will offer reduced wait times for families of those with Autism; the Village of Rhinebeck police cars are now equipped with Sensory Kits; Ruge’s Automotive intends to offer a Sensory Safe Space during Porchfest; and Northern Dutchess Hospital has designated rooms in the emergency room that are better suited for patients with autism, which have softer paint colors and easy-in, easy-out access.
The Rhinebeck Freemasons also hosted an event recently, raising $2,500 to support the Village project.

“The outpouring of support for this project has been truly extraordinary,” said Mayor Gary Bassett. “It just takes one simple thing to make a difference in someone’s life; I’m proud of our local businesses and organizations for recognizing the impact they can have.”

Added Kathleen Marshall, director of program services at Anderson Center for Autism, “This is a pilot project, so we weren’t sure what to expect. We’ve seen similar efforts in other communities across the globe, and felt compelled to make it happen here since it’s right in Anderson’s backyard. The Village of Rhinebeck community has demonstrated tremendous commitment to people with Autism by embracing our project with open minds and hearts - some commitments have already been fulfilled, and others are forthcoming. It’s exciting to be part of this movement.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 59 are now diagnosed with Autism, a neurological disorder marked by communication, social, and behavioral challenges.

“In many cases, people with Autism and their families are extremely isolated because communities either don’t have the understanding or the tools to support them. Imagine what it would look like to have every community follow Rhinebeck’s lead; what a difference that could make for the countless people who are diagnosed - and for all of us who have so much to learn from them,” said Patrick Paul, CEO and Executive Director at Anderson Center for Autism.

Eliza Bozenski, Chief Development Officer, continued, “Anderson’s consulting team has long been sharing expertise with people out in the community, but this is the first time we’ve seen an entire village get involved. And it wouldn’t be hard for others to follow suit; small adjustments can help support this population in a big way. It might be that a store installs softer lighting, minimizes loud music, or simply develops an easier-to-navigate system for checkout. Perhaps a business that has customers or employees with autism receives training on how to communicate using one-step directions. Maybe a municipality or organization learns why quiet, private areas in public spaces are needed for families when someone with autism feels overstimulated. Whatever the case may be, by completing trainings with our consulting team, everyone becomes more empowered with knowledge and is better prepared to help the growing population of people who have autism.”

For parents, the collaboration between Anderson Center for Autism and the Village of Rhinebeck, funded in part by The Thomas Thompson Trust and endorsed by Dutchess County’s THINK DIFFERENTLY initiative, provides promise for the future.
Katy Kollar, parent of an Anderson Center for Autism resident and President of Anderson Family Partners, is now one of the volunteers talking to Village of Rhinebeck businesses and collecting pledges. She reflected: “As a family, we are so grateful for this culture of compassion. Small changes give children like our son a chance to be wholly integrated into our community, which fosters his growth and development, and in turn, helps everyone become better.”

Added Michele Hughes, Chair of the Village of Rhinebeck Autism Supportive Community Committee, “We are so grateful to all who see the opportunity to make a difference and get on board with this initiative. It’s a truly special effort, and I encourage anyone who hasn’t already to get involved.”

For more information or to learn more about how to get your community involved in a similar effort, call 845.889.9208 or visit andersoncenterforautism.org.

**About Anderson Center for Autism**
Our mission at Anderson Center for Autism is to optimize the quality of life for people with autism.

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