

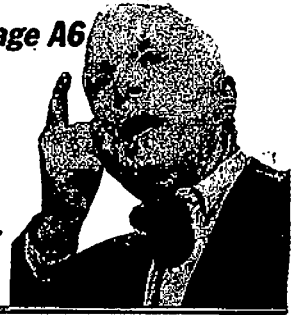
SERVING THE GREENE  
COUNTY AREA SINCE 1792

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## Lifespire Inc. provides socializing activities for children with disabilities

By Billie Dunn

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Greene County Community Services has partnered with Lifespire Inc., a New York City-based non-profit, to offer the first program in the Town of Catskill aimed toward providing respite for local children with disabilities.

"Greene and Columbia counties are in need of services for younger children, primarily those who have been diagnosed with Autism," said Virginia Gresko, Lifespire's director of residential operations.

Gresko has been working with Lifespire for nearly two decades, and for 50 years the company has been working with disabled individuals to help them reach "life's aspirations." Lifespire currently serves more than 5,000 individuals with developmental disabilities throughout the five boroughs of New York, and has more than 110 group homes and apartments for individuals challenged with physical and mental disabilities. Lifespire also has several after-school respite programs operating in New York City that afford children and teenagers with Autism the opportunity to participate in enjoyable social activities.

The new Greene County service will be a Saturday Respite Program at the former West Bridge Street Firehouse. It is slated to serve 10 school-age children for 42 Saturdays a year. The program will offer social opportunities as well as a variety of activities including reading, cooking, art-

work and community events.

Lifespire also donated a computer program called Tech4Everyone (T4E), which enables people, even those who cannot read or write, the ability to use a computer independently. Several local parents and children attended a T4E demonstration at the fire

mental health clinics, screening and placement of aging out consumers, family support services, family reimbursement programs, crisis intervention, behavior management, travel training, and outreach services.

The not-for-profit also offers vocational programs which provide individuals

divisions under the New York State Set Aside Program.

Lifespire's marketing division has run a successful Contract Packaging Service for more than 40 years conveniently located in each of the five boroughs. The company's clients cover a wide range of businesses including garment manufacturers, cosmetics manufacturers, die cutters, advertising agencies, and more. Each of the contracts provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to learn a variety of skills as well as paychecks.

Lifespire recently began working in New Jersey, and plans to open a home in Westchester for six young men this fall. Greene County Mental Health director Peter Konrad contacted Gresko to collaborate on the upcoming Greene County project.

"This is a wonderful thing, and we're very excited about Lifespire coming to the county," said Konrad. "This is a great opportunity for local parents to have their children receive services on Saturdays."

Gresko plans on training staff on Sept. 13, and meeting with parents and children shortly thereafter. She also hopes to extend services to nearby Ulster, Dutchess, Orange and Putnam counties in the future.

"This program provides a wonderful opportunity for children with disabilities to get out and socialize," said Gresko. "It provides them the same social opportunities that most children have."



Billie Dunn/Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

The Olde Firehouse, the site of the future Saturday Respite Program, on West Bridge Street in Catskill.

house on Bridge Street last month, and according to Gresko the children loved the program.

Lifespire offers a variety of services within its more than 15-day programs and workshops, including adult

with meaningful work. For more than a decade Lifespire has been a producing member of New York State Industries for the Disabled, and has begun to provide commodities to state agencies and other political sub-