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Disability Pride Month: A Celebration of Visible and Vibrant Lives

BY DR. CLAUDIA SCHRADER

There was a time when individuals with disabilities were shut away, hidden away, and sent away to institutions. Many did not exist as a part of the broader society but apart from it. Since that time, however, incredible strides have been made in the area of education and with regards to ensuring rights for individuals with disabilities. July 26th marked the 32nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which helped empower millions of individuals with physical and mental disabilities to live without limits. ADA changed the way we look at disability from a medical diagnosis to one of function and guaranteed fair accessibility.

ADA ensures that employers cannot discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities; that they may access public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels, shopping centers, and offices; and have access to transportation services; and receive services for individuals with speech, sight or hearing disabilities – a challenged many people with disabilities face

today. Spurred by the passing of this important legislation, July has also been designated as Disability Pride Month. It is a time when individuals with disabilities, who once lived their lives in the shadows, are celebrated and their contributions are lauded.

This month, I am excited to celebrate and laud Kingsborough Community College (KCC) Alumna Ketrina Hazell, Miss Wheelchair New York State 2018, who has made it her career to advocate for students with disabilities.

As a youngster in high school, not many career and educational options were offered to Ketrina. She remembers day programs, which were much like adult day care programs, and didn't have many meaningful activities. Although day programs are a path some people with disabilities need to take, "it just didn't fit my path. Disability is not a one size fit all," said Ketrina. Last month, she released her first book, *Special Education to College, The Ketrina Story: Breaking Those Glass Ceilings*.

"When I wrote my book, I



Ketrina Hazell, a KCC Alumna, book author and Miss Wheelchair New York State 2018, has made it her career to advocate for students with disabilities.

thought about how education was the biggest part of my journey and how I had to continuously advocate for myself and tell professionals that this is what I wanted to do and this is how I'm going to make it happen," said Ketrina, who was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy as an infant and scoliosis as a teen.

Ketrina went on to graduate from high school and was accepted at KCC. She sought and

found an aide who could accompany her to classes. She also took online courses at different colleges and transferred the credits to KCC. Along the way, she became Miss Wheelchair New York State and was able to raise awareness throughout the state about students with disabilities. Her platform focused on advocating for more inclusivity and allowed her to do training with educators on disability awareness, talk to school superintendents about bringing disability awareness to public schools and speak at a number of graduations.

She shares that although her reign as Miss Wheelchair New York State was for two years, the work still continues. "It is almost a career now," she said. Currently, Ketrina serves as a certified professional coach and does life coaching for people with disabilities. She has started her own mentoring program called Disability Champion Mentoring Network, which focuses on supporting Special Education transition programming for underserved youth with disabilities.

We are grateful that many high school graduates with disabilities choose KCC as the next stop in their educational journey. This past year, the KCC Office for Access-Ability Services served 527 students with disabilities. In addition to serving as a resource to the KCC community regarding disability issues, the office determines eligibility for and arranges academic accommodations as well as academic advisement and priority registration, facilitates the use of assistive technology, and assists students in developing self-advocacy skills.

And such is the case with Ketrina. She lives her life with incredible vibrancy and is a tireless advocate for individuals with disabilities and one whose mission is to make disability visible.

Dr. Claudia V. Schrader is president of Kingsborough Community College (KCC), a 70-acre academic oasis in beautiful Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn. For more information about KCC Office for Access-Ability Services visit www.kbcc.cuny.edu/access-ability/homepage.html.