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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Medina County resident honored for her incredible effort to help individuals with disabilities live independently and gain employment**

April 2014

CLEVELAND – Dianne DePasquale-Hagerty, executive director of Medina Creative Housing, is being honored at the Milestones 12th Annual Autism Spectrum Disorder Conference in June for her dedication to create opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

“[Dianne] is a creative and dynamic leader who daily shows her commitment to people with special needs,” Jennifer Wintner, attorney/consultant, said when she nominated Hagerty. “Not only is Dianne always looking for new projects … but she relentlessly works to ensure ideas come to fruition.”

Hagerty will be awarded the Community Innovator Award for her work as the first executive director working on behalf of individuals with disabilities for Medina Creative Housing. Through Hagerty’s leadership, Medina Creative Housing has developed nationally-recognized housing and services for individuals with disabilities including 14 single-family homes in the community where individuals with disabilities live in a congregate setting , 34 Independent Living with Supports single-and-double-garden style apartment units, a Life Steps Life Skills Training Program for transitioning into independent housing, and vocational training and employment for the school districts in Medina County.

“The inclusive services available through Medina County Housing due to Dianne’s leadership are transformative for adults with special needs and provide a model for other communities to emulate,” Ilana Hoffer Skoff, Milestones executive director and co-founder, said. “Not only providing housing and transition services, but providing the opportunity for individuals of all abilities to gain the skills they will need to live independently.”

Currently, Medina Creative Housing provides training and employment in several specialty areas: Property Maintenance/Construction providing real life, hands-on experience; Medina Creative Produce Hydroponic Greenhouse producing skills in planting, cultivating, harvesting and marketing; Medina Creative Coffee where employees are roasting, grinding, packaging and distributing signature gourmet coffee blends; Medina Creative Pet Play providing skill development and animal care; Medina Creative Therapy Ranch offering skill development in barn management and horse care. The organization is also a certified Employment Network through the Ticket to Work Program and places individuals with disabilities into community employment.

Hagerty also has new, innovative programs in the works including bike rentals and housing near a community college.

Along with Hagerty, four other individuals will be honored at the Conference for their efforts to provide services and supports for individuals with disabilities including : Alison Edie, special education teacher at Orchard Middle School, receiving the Outstanding Educator Award; Justin Bachman, student at Solon High School, receiving the Teen Trailblazer Award; Sarah Rintamaki, executive director of Connecting for Kids, receiving the Parent Tribute Award; and Sister Agnesmarie LoPorto, president of Julie Billiart School, receiving the Professional Excellence Award.

Milestones 12th Annual Autism Spectrum Disorder Conference will be June 18-19 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Cleveland I-X Center. Parents and professionals are invited to attend and enjoy over 75 educational workshops. New to this year, the Conference will offer exclusive new parent features, a Medical Track, Employment Track and more. National keynotes include Dr. Peter Gerhardt, EdD, national autism consultant, and Brittany Lauber and Justin Rooney, self-advocates and co-chairs of the Ohio State University/Central Ohio Chapter of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network. Find more information and register at milestones.org.

**About Milestones Autism Resources**

Founded in 2003, Milestones Autism Resources, previously known as Milestones Autism Organization, helps individuals with autism throughout Northeast Ohio reach their unique potential and is the first call for help at each transition of an individual’s life. Milestones focuses on **educating** and **coaching** for family members and professionals in evidence-based practical strategies. Its conferences, workshops, professional development, referral calls and online resources **connect** the autism community with vital information, and each other. Milestones serves more than 1,500 people each year and reaches 34,000 unique visitors through its website, milestones.org, that provides more than 900 autism resources.

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