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Connecting Communities 2009 marks the start of unique disability coalition

First meeting for the Connecting Communities Coalition will be November 19

Portland, Oregon October 16, 2009 – Nearly 500 people from all walks of life gathered together last night at the inaugural event of Connecting Communities. Individuals with disabilities, senators, state representatives, county and city commissioners and esteemed business leaders united to support and celebrate commonalities, as well as honor the differences. Last night marked the beginning of a strong, diverse, effective coalition—the Connecting Communities Coalition (CCC).

Olegario “Ollie” Cantos VII, Vice Chair at the President's Committee for people with intellectual disabilities and the keynote speaker for the evening, began his speech by reflecting on the past and a time when people with disabilities were viewed as inferiors, as second-class citizens. “When we look at that change in paradigm, we now view disabilities as part of who we are, but not necessarily representing the whole of who we are,” Cantos said with passion. “We instead embrace the civil rights approach and recognize our talents and abilities.”

Cantos discussed the value of coalitions and how that ultimately led to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, more than 19 years ago.

“It is that very same spirit of coalition that gathers us here tonight,” he said. “As we look around this room today we must dedicate ourselves to the value of coalition by recognizing that everyone must be a part of this vehicle for collective change.”

“It is important this evening to recognize those who have just been appointed to the Commission of Disability here in Portland,” Cantos said. “They bring to the table knowledge, talents, skills and gusto,” he said as laughter filled the ballroom.

“CC09 was a huge success that involved cross-organizational team effort and work,” said Therese Grayson, Director of PR for Portland Habilitation Center Northwest. “It may be time to rest for a moment, and then the real work in forming the coalition begins.”

A large number of people have already signed up to be part of the CCC. For more information or if you are interested in getting involved email connectingcommunities@phcnw.com

About Portland Habilitation Center Northwest (PHCNW)

PHCNW has provided nearly 60 years of broad-based educational, training and job opportunities (with full union benefits) for thousands of people with developmental, physical and mental disabilities. As a dynamic and forward-thinking industry leader, PHCNW’s diversified business lines have allowed it to help employees develop the technical skills required to earn living wages in a variety of occupations, thus enabling them to pay taxes and empowering them to raise families and live independently. PHCNW’s influence extends into the general community through provision of affordable housing programs, and environmental stewardship in the form of developing the largest contiguous solar energy array in the Pacific Northwest region.

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