

Calling all entrepreneurs

Dan Brady, professional development co-chairman, Rochester Young Professionals

With cranes in the air and backhoes in the dirt, Rochester's downtown is in the midst of a massive transformation. The old is giving way to the new.

This is not lost on young professionals in the area. The momentum of downtown's renaissance mirrors growth in local YP organizations—both in numbers and in scope.

Rochester Young Professionals is perhaps the most widely known such group. Dan Brady, co-chairman of RYP's professional development committee, says YPs sense optimism about the future of business here and are settling into a role that supports the region's growth. RYP's upcoming Entrepreneurial Expo will showcase those businesses and give people a chance to exchange ideas and find tips for growing their own.

Brady says his peers are excited to build their careers and businesses in Rochester. "They like being in Rochester, specifically the city, because of all that's going on," he says.

The expo will be held from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Nov. 17 at the Arbor Loft on Pitkin Street, right on the edge of the Inner Loop transformation. The first hour is networking to give vendors and attendees a chance to talk shop and mingle.

Presentations by young business owners will follow: Nicole Kazimer of Hello Yoga Girl and Chris Spinelli of Roc Brewery will talk about their successes and failures and how they have made connections to build their businesses.

Junior Achievement of Central Upstate New York, based in Rochester, is sending staff members to talk about the financial literacy and business-building skills they teach middle-to-high-school students. They'll also spell out volunteering opportunities.

For Rochester to embody a climate of economic renewal will require action from all demographics, young and old, Brady says. Expo organizers are eager to see business people at all stages of their careers at the event.

"It's an exciting time," Brady says. "We are actively trying to promote young professionals to get involved, but it definitely takes collaboration from people of all ages."

Three dozen vendors from all sectors will attend. The setup is less about selling products than talking about what running a business is like, Brady says. Vendors include Evoke Foods, Aerix Drones, Feltro Fashion Italy, Inspired Wellness/Young Living Essential Oils, Electronic Merchant Systems, Optic Sky Productions and Impact Earth.

"It's really about providing a platform for these entrepreneurs to talk about their experiences. ... All entrepreneurs are consumed by their ideas, and I think they love sharing their stories," Brady says.

Business builders will send experts who can answer questions, including High Technology Rochester, Bonadio Group and the Ain Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Rochester.

Kiva Rochester also will be represented. The global program provides crowd-funded microloans with zero interest through the city of Rochester. Rochester Economic Development Corp. matches loan funds dollar-for-dollar for qualifying businesses.

"I think a lot of people aren't aware of how encouraging municipalities can be to support businesses," Brady says.

"There's a lot of excitement for what's going on. I think there's a lot of opportunity," he adds. "I hope people leave the event encouraged by all that's going on." *RY-P.org*



Accessible recreation is her game

Her eye on inclusion, Anita O'Brien arranges adventures for everyone

By **KERRY FELTNER**

In college she noted how ants create communities. Growing up, she watched her friends interact to better understand them.

Anita O'Brien has always been an observer. Today she is holistic in her vision for helping to create an inclusive community that thinks about everyone—including those with disabilities.

"I think I've always been a little bit more of an observer," O'Brien says. "I would always take the perimeter and just watch and observe people, and part of that was just my natural inclination to be quieter and more observant than having to be right in the middle. (Doing that) you get a sense of people, that sense of character."

Last year, O'Brien parlayed those useful introvert traits into launching Rochester Accessible Adventures Inc. Working with businesses, municipalities and medical offices, the nonprofit finds ways for people with disabilities to enjoy recreation with friends and family.

O'Brien is a certified therapeutic recreation specialist and executive director of RAA. She was trained as a certified inclusivity assessor through SUNY College at Cortland's Inclusion Recreation Resource Center.

"Looking back at my career path thus far, I have to smile," O'Brien says. "Our motto in graduate school for therapeutic recreation was 'we work so others can play.' I remember how that intrigued me then. I can say that being a 'facilitator of happiness' is something that completely resonates with me, and I'm very glad I have been open to following that path."

RAA has 27 founding members and 13 board members. It also has a stable of volunteers who learn the ropes during clinics, watching O'Brien in action.

RAA developed a partnership with Eric Canal Boat Co. called Canal Pals to provide volunteer boating companions to anyone with a disability who would like to rent a kayak and enjoy time on the water. RAA applies the same volunteer arrangement for pickleball instruction with Pickled Power, she says.

O'Brien is a native of Georgia but has lived in Rochester for over a decade. She began her studies at the University of Georgia and chose her own academic path rather than pick a major.

"I entered college not knowing," O'Brien says. "I had this great interest in people—I knew that much. It actually did work out really well that I could create my own degree of study, so I called it bio-sociology, which I described as human interactions with humans and human interactions with our environment. We all have roles, and that's something that is just part of your culture no matter where you are."

O'Brien earned a master's degree in therapeutic recreation at Georgia in 1995. She left the state and lived in Iowa for



Photo by Kimberly Simpson

four years, working as a chore worker for aging or disabled people who wanted to remain in their homes. The work was physical, but it was another study of human roles, O'Brien says.

"I loved physical stuff—the lawns in Iowa were big and the snow was deep and I had a shovel—but the people I met were the sociological attachment," O'Brien says. "There was one woman who was 101 living in her own farmhouse in Iowa, still had a garden, and I would spend lots of time with her after doing her yard, just understanding people and getting their stories. It's just very cool."

Ready for a change, O'Brien moved to Provincetown, Mass., on Cape Cod and began working for a kayaking company to lead training for people of all skills and abilities.

"When people are in situations where they have a range of emotions or they're bringing whatever baggage, and you don't know, you need to be crystal clear on what instructions you give them," O'Brien says. "And that has been a teaching point when I'm working and training the (RAA) trainers and helping them understand."

In 2000, O'Brien moved to Rochester. The area, with its strengths and history in medicine, proved the perfect location for her line of work. O'Brien landed a job as coordinator of recreation and day services with the Center for Disability Rights.

"(Rochester has) strong resources in terms of different types of services for people with disabilities, so that made for a lot of opportunity," O'Brien says. "Right off the bat I found a recreation job for people with disabilities; that was my grounding here."

At CDR, she received a federal rec-

reation grant to design a program providing adventure recreation—including scuba diving, horseback riding and rock climbing—that were departures from traditionally safer pursuits.

Helping others get out and adapt helped O'Brien adapt to the city herself, she says.

"It was good for me because I (said), 'OK, what do you do in this city?'" O'Brien says. "We started going everywhere people go in Rochester. We were going to festivals and fairs and the movies and exploring different restaurants. That was a pivotal time for me to learn how the city works."

In 2009, she took a management job at SportsNet, an adaptive sports and recreation company in Brighton that has brought more than 6,000 people into recreational experiences. The job helped O'Brien see the niche a nonprofit could fill in the market.

Today, Rochester Accessible Adventures works with recreation businesses to create an inclusive atmosphere. Activities span from kayaking to cycling to sled hockey.

"We have taken that step back and said, 'What is the need?'" O'Brien says. "And the need is that families and friends recreate together, and if they have a disability they are still able to do it. As a business marketing thing it's actually pretty big; it's a niche that people haven't tapped into, and so that's the part of inclusion that we're teaching them. My goal is that wherever people want to go, they're able to go."

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