

A message from EPIC's Chairman of the Board of Directors

On February 28, 2020, EPIC hosted its 35th Annual Dinner Gala at the Garden City hotel to thank our many supporters and raise money for critical unfunded programs. More than 300 guests attended, our largest gala gathering to date. I had the honor to co-chair the event as we celebrated the achievements of outstanding medical professionals, incredible families, and successful business leaders, all of whom inspired us with their support for EPIC and their own life stories. Over the course of the evening, EPIC raised the most money ever from a single fundraising event, including more than \$100,000 during a live mission auction to secure funds for needed renovations to our residences and our educational and community outreach programs. It was indeed a night to remember. A gathering of friends and colleagues, socializing, with great food, drink, and live music.

That was how 2020 began for EPIC.

Of course it is ending on a much different note. Somewhat ironically, the theme of the gala was “Leaping into 2020: Our Perfect Vision for the Future.” But I suspect nobody in attendance truly foresaw the storm about to hit. That evening, I spoke to our guests about how EPIC’s vision for its future success depends largely on its past – a past built on a strong foundation of community engagement and financial support, a dedicated team of professionals and staff, sound leadership, fiscal responsibility, and a Board that understands the mission of the agency and its role in helping EPIC succeed.

Yet despite the extraordinary challenges wrought by a global pandemic, near depression-era levels of economic loss, and the sheer exhaustion of coping with overrun hospitals, quarantines, supply shortages, and unimaginable sickness and tragic deaths, that message remains true today. EPIC is strong – and will survive – because of who we are and what all of us have built together.

EPIC's roots date back to 1953 when a small organization called the United Epilepsy Association began assisting a population of 38,000 individuals with epilepsy. In 1980 EPIC moved to a larger rented space and started providing physical and occupational therapy services. By 2010 EPIC had established a mental health clinic. And by 2020 EPIC was operating more than 18 residences, had purchased its current headquarters at 1500 Hempstead Turnpike, had combined forces with South Shore Guidance Center to provide mental health services to children, and had become the only agency on Long Island to offer its combined suite of services to both children and adults in the areas of mental health, day habilitation, community education, group residential living, and epilepsy care.

Throughout its nearly 70-year history EPIC has survived and thrived. Swirling around it were events such as civil unrest, recessions and stock market crashes, terrorist attacks, and devastating storm destruction. And now Covid-19. As with other traumatic life-changing events, EPIC has adapted and found new and innovative ways to continue providing services to our extraordinary people in care.

None of this year was easy. Or expected. But it was necessary, indeed essential. And as Chair of EPIC's Board, I could not be prouder of how the entire organization responded to this unprecedented situation. As new vaccines and therapeutics become available, we can see a glimmer of light at the end of this dark tunnel. But we are not through the crises yet. The community we serve continues to suffer greatly and continues to need our help and dedication now more than ever. EPIC remains fully committed to its mission.

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So as we enter a New Year, I want to share a simple message with all of you: one of thanks and hope.

First, the thanks. On behalf of the entire Board, there simply are no words to convey our amazement at your tireless and unending devotion to all those we help and serve every day. EPIC is blessed to have you and I want you to know that all of your sacrifices, both great and small, have not gone unnoticed. From the top down, you have all given much more of yourselves this year than any organization could reasonably expect. The Board recognizes and sincerely thanks every one of you.

As for the hope, I know that there will be better and brighter days ahead for all of us. Do not lose sight of who you help; and why. Keep EPIC's mission close to your heart. Continue to enrich the lives of those you serve. *Enrich them.* And enrich yourselves in the process. Author and artist Vivian Greene famously said that: "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It is about learning to dance in the rain." Throughout this storm, you have shown us that EPIC will continue dancing. And perhaps sometime in 2021 we may even be able to dance again in the way we started off 2020, with a gathering of friends and colleagues, socializing, with great food, drink, and live music.

Wishing you a peaceful, healthy, and hopeful 2021,

Jeffrey Nagel

Chair, EPIC Board of Directors