HONORARY CHAIRPERSON SPEECH

FOR

CHRISTINE SIRIANNI

Hello everyone. It’s wonderful to be here to celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of such a great organization. My husband \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I are thankful and humbled to have been named as Honorary Chairpersons of this, the 5th Annual Gala for Rivershore. As many of you know, (**name your husband**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I have been residents in this region for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years and we have been committed to contributing support to our neighbors and friends on many levels: as parents, professionals and concerned members of this region. We represent the medical community in outreach as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is a doctor, known for his particularly excellent and attentive care **(If you want to make** **a little joke**)… If I **DO** say so myself… (**and wait for the laugh**) I am a registered nurse and have been, what I hope, is a committed and compassionate catalyst in the formation of local family support and advocacy groups focusing on working with individuals with Downs Syndrome. As parents to three wonderful daughters, we are proud and inspired by their accomplishments, but it is our youngest daughter Andrea who has fueled our compassion and sparked our determination to make the contributions to Rivershore and the amazing organizations that work to enable “otherabled” individuals to live independently, efficiently and with pride.

This year we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Beatles and their “British Invasion.” How many of you were around for the frenzy whipped up in that cold February in 1964?? Okay… I understand if you don’t want to “admit” that…” (**Wait for the** **laugh**). Their arrival heralded a new era and their music touched our souls. John Lennon’s album, “Imagine” debuted in 1971 and, as so many of the lyrics written by members of this group, the title song gave us all pause to really think… “Imagine **all** the people, **sharing** all the world….” As each one of our daughters was born; \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and ultimately Andrea in 1988, each blessed occasion gave us a reason to imagine: What would life be like for them? How would each one make her mark in this world? How will they each work, in their own unique ways, to live the best life they could possibly have? How will each one triumph over adversity? And what could we do to support and enable their dreams? Twenty-six years ago, when our daughter Andrea was born, (**name your husband**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I had a lot of questions to ask. We also knew that we would do whatever it took to see to it that our child would have her dreams and realize them as well. Andrea was born with a life threatening heart anomaly requiring surgical repair, which is common in children who are born developmentally challenged (**Please use the expression you prefer if not this**) but that never, **EVER** stopped her, or us, quite frankly. In fact, she seemed to grow bolder with every step in her life’s journey, and we all walked on that path together with love, faith, hope and the conviction that with hard work, dreams **DO** come true. Throughout her life, Andrea has been a catalyst to support inclusive education programs with the goal of preparation for living an independent and self-directed life…. but I will allow **HER** to share a little more about that in a little while.

Andrea and Matt are examples of just how far our lives have advanced on so many levels, and in particular, understanding, compassion, inclusion, respect, and acceptance. Imagine a world where **EVERYONE** is respected, granted dignity, and the right to life; where barriers are broken down and stereotypes are rendered obsolete. I want to believe we’re getting there. We’re all in this together, and whether “it takes two” or “it takes a village,” there is great comfort in knowing we are not alone. There are so many people to whom we owe so much gratitude for being there and encouraging Andrea every step of the way. Of course her sisters, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are her rocks and her greatest teachers. They are her idols and have taught her everything she knows and loves, and I can guarantee you, Andrea has taught them a thing or two as well!! Of course, we want to thank the rest of Andrea’s “Arc of Angels.” First, our most sincere thanks go to Rivershore Incorporated, for your vision and direct support in the creation of the program that has allowed Andrea to realize her dream of living an independent life. To the independent living specialists who facilitate the dream, and to all of you that allow yourselves to be “schooled” by our wonderful daughter, you cannot imagine how much we value your paticipation. Of course at the center of the arc is Andrea herself, lighting up every day, inspiring us with her growth and insights, and really teaching us more about the value of life than any book could ever teach us.

Our daughters are the great joy of our lives and I cannot imagine a world without their inspiration. They fuel us every day to bring their love and humanity to all that we meet, and we thank all of you for being our partners in making this community a better place… for EVERYONE.

(**If you are going to introduce Andrea you can say**), Ladies and gentlemen, as a very proud parent, I would like to introduce you to an extraordinary young woman who, at this point, **probably** needs no introduction… so here’s our terrific daughter, Andrea Sirianni!!!

Thank you all!