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HUMAN TECHNOLOGIES TO SUPPORT AUTISM RESEARCH AT MASONIC MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

MMRI Receives \$5K Gift Towards Autism Research, Sparking New Community Partnership

UTICA, NY — Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) impact over 1500 children in the Central New York region. This heightened prevalence sparked the beginning of focused ASD research at the Masonic Medical Research Institute (MMRI). Together in collaborative partnership with local organizations, including the Kelberman Center, Resource Center for Independent Living, ADHD & Autism Psychological Services and Advocacy PLLC, and Upstate Cerebral Palsy, MMRI is working to understand the genetic, environmental, and social impacts of autism in our region. Now, MMRI has attracted the interest of yet another local partner to help them in their research efforts.

MMRI received a \$5,000 donation from Human Technologies (HT), a gift that will be used to help foster a connection between the Institute and one of its closest Utica neighbors; in fact, they are right around the corner from each other on Dwyer Ave! On March 10, 2022, Tim Giarrusso, President and CEO of HT; Jim Stewart, Board Chair of HT; Nathan Linck, Marketing and Communications Manager at HT; and Dr. Michael Kelberman, Founder and Board President of the Kelberman Center and Chair of MMRI's Community Advisory Committee, joined the MMRI team onsite to present them with this generous donation. "This gift is made possible by our employees and our belief that their work makes everything possible; their efforts are transformative to our community. We are very excited about this new partnership with MMRI and the opportunity to continue our collaboration with the Kelberman Center," said Tim Giarrusso.

The commitment of Human Technologies to employ and support individuals with ASD now goes one step further: supporting research at MMRI to better understand the causes of these disorders and to create greater awareness of ASD in the Mohawk Valley. "We are excited to have this support from our community and one of our closest Utica neighbors. Indeed, it is inspiring to see how many organizations and businesses have rallied around this cause in Central New York, and to see all those who are committed to helping individuals with ASD. I look forward to discovering what we can accomplish together," said Dr. Maria Kontaridis, Executive Director and Gordon K. Moe Professor and Chair of the Biomedical Research and Translational Medicine at MMRI.

"This type of collaboration between Human Technologies, MMRI, and the Kelberman Center is crucial as we work together to improve the lives of children and families living with ASD.

Research remains at the core of what will transform our understanding, and we applaud Human Technologies and their employees for their commitment to the ASD effort,” said Dr. Kelberman.

ASDs, affecting 1 in 59 children across the United States (CDC), are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. At MMRI, researchers in the Kontaridis Lab are working to better understand the genetics of ASD by comparing the DNA of children diagnosed with autism to their unaffected parents or siblings. Through this work, MMRI researchers can evaluate how autism risk mutations are transmitted in families. “Our goal is to understand the underlying mechanism of ASD. By studying the genes causal to the disease and figuring out how they might disrupt normal neurological function, we can work to better understand the effects the mutations have on the brain, ultimately, to develop better therapeutic options for affected individuals,” said Dr. Luana Nunes Santos, Postdoctoral Fellow at MMRI.

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MMRI is dedicated to scientific research that improves the health and quality of life for all. We strive to conduct high quality research aimed at developing a deep understanding of diseases and generating innovative cures and treatments. For more information about MMRI, please visit mmri.edu or find us on social media!