

ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

CRAIG V. LOPEZ
Ulster County Legislature
District No. 14
Shawangunk & Wawarsing



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OCTOBER 15th IS "WHITE CANE AWARENESS DAY"



District 14 Legislator Craig Lopez with Jaime Bunt, Peer Support Specialist at RCAL

Ulster County Legislator Craig Lopez (R, C, I – Shawangunk, Wawarsing) introduced a resolution at the September Legislative Session naming October 15, 2013 “White Cane Awareness Day” in Ulster County.

Lopez hopes designating “White Cane Awareness Day” will serve to educate the public and make drivers alert to individuals with white canes and guide dogs as they make their way around Ulster County.

“It is important that we empower everyone to strive for independence and the opportunity to participate in public activities.” Lopez remarked. “The white cane is a universal symbol and provides a blind person legal status in traffic in every state and many other countries.”

President Lyndon B. Johnson established the first National White Cane Safety Day on October 15, 1964. Johnson noted that the white cane is symbolic of independence and self-reliance. He urged the day be set aside to celebrate the achievements of people who are blind or visually impaired.

Jaime Bunt, a Peer Support Specialist at the Resource Center for Accessible Living (RCAL) in Kingston, NY, brought the idea to co-worker Keith Gurgui. “I was pleased and proud to inform her that I knew a great fellow on the Legislature who would be more than happy to help and quickly contacted Craig,” Gurgui said.

“The white cane is a tool of independence” said Bunt, who lost her sight 9 years ago. “I use a seeing-eye dog now but the white cane is what got me out into the world to start my life anew.”

New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law § 1153 requires motorists to yield the right of way to the visually impaired or blind. It states “Every driver of a vehicle approaching an intersection or crosswalk shall yield the right of way to a pedestrian crossing or attempting to cross the roadway when such pedestrian is accompanied by a guide dog or using a cane which is metallic or white in color or white with a red tip.”

“Craig is proof that it is ability that matters,” Majority Leader Kenneth Ronk said. “He is one of the hardest working legislators I know.” Ronk noted that the Lopez resolution had the unanimous support of his fellow legislators.

“I believe Craig’s vigilant work is a testament to this Legislator’s commitment to serving the people of Ulster County,” Gurgui said. He was pleased with the Legislature’s willingness embrace the goals of RCAL and their awareness of needs of individuals with disabilities.

“I urge all residents and visitors to be aware when they see someone navigating with a white cane or guide dog and obey the law to insure the safety of everyone.” Lopez said. “I thank Jaime, Keith and all the folks at RCAL for their diligent outreach and hard work.”

For more information on services and programs for people with special needs, Ulster County residents can contact RCAL at www.rcal.org or call 845-331-0541 (TTY 845-331-4527).

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