

Pillar Awardee
Thomas H. Pyle, MBA, MS, CPRP



On November 18, 2023, Thomas H. Pyle will become NAMI Mercer's 12th Pillar awardee for his extraordinary, long-term contribution to the organization's mission through volunteerism, leadership, advocacy, and charitable giving.

Tom recently demonstrated his dedication to the NAMI Mercer community in the most profound way at this year's NAMIWalks Mercer County on May 21. Just two weeks after losing his only son to suicide, Tom courageously addressed the 400 in attendance, pledging to continue his volunteer work and inspiring others to remain hopeful.

Tom has made an exceptional contribution to the NAMI Mercer Board since 2011, currently serving as its president. His extensive experience as a senior executive in banking, business, and non-profit/community health services has been a great asset to our organization.

Since his son Adam's diagnosis with schizophrenia in 2007, Tom has centered his world around helping his son and advocating for others affected by mental illness. To increase his knowledge and effectiveness, he returned to school late in life to earn an MS in Psychiatric Rehabilitation from Rutgers and to become a certified psychiatric rehabilitation practitioner.

Tom's chief area of contribution has been advocacy. He was a long-standing leader of the NAMI Mercer Advocacy Committee and very involved in its Trenton Psychiatric Hospital (TPH) Monitoring Program. When, in 2011, the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services (DMHS) established a new program to check on the quality of care in state psychiatric hospitals, Tom became a certified monitor, dedicated to ensuring that patients receive appropriate care and services in a safe and therapeutic environment.

Tom's participation in the monitoring program enabled him to network with officials of the County's Division of Mental Health Services (DMHS) and with the administrators of TPH. He sits on the NJ Behavioral Health Planning Council and is a member of the NJ Psychiatric

Rehabilitation Association, two affiliations that inform NAMI Mercer and give our organization a voice at the table.

On his own initiative, Tom became an expert in the area of supportive housing in NJ. He served on the Board of Community Enterprises Corporation (CEC), which manages the Collaborative Support Services of New Jersey's shared housing. Tom frequently assists members of the community with housing issues and has made presentations on the subject, including at Harvest of Hope.

In 2017, Tom produced and directed a NAMI Mercer documentary named *Passage to Hope*, which won top honors as Best Documentary at the Nassau Film Festival in Princeton. The film was made possible when NAMI Mercer was selected as one of Princeton Community TV's 2016 "Community Partners" for special training and help in shooting and editing a high-quality film product for use as promotional and educational content. Appearing in the movie are NAMI Mercer members and loved ones who share the effects of mental illness on their family lives. Members of the video production team were NAMI Mercer volunteers. This film has helped to spread NAMI's mission of hope and support.

Tom also has been instrumental in establishing NAMI Mercer's Hearing Voices Network (HVN), a peer-focused forum for people who hear voices and their loved ones to share information, support, and understanding. This group is intended to be an adjunct/alternative to voice-suppressing anti-psychotic medications which have inconsistent impact and severe side effects. The HVN support group is a rare resource for our most seriously ill and an opportunity for NAMI to partner with other leading community mental health providers and advocates.

Another of Tom's innovations is a NAMI Mercer service he has named "Helpline Plus". He personally takes referrals from the Helpline, the DMHS, and the community to provide in-depth, long-term assistance with very challenging situations involving persons with mental illness. Applying his expertise and connections with multiple systems, he has advocated to locate missing family members, to find housing for a man just out of prison, and to arrange a hearing for a patient languishing at a psychiatric forensic unit... Tom truly lives the NAMI Mercer motto "You are not alone."

Most recently, Tom has been engaged with leaders in impoverished areas of Trenton to ask how NAMI Mercer can assist them with improving mental health in their communities. He has initiated dialogue with the clergy of several churches, the Board of Education, congressional representatives, the African American Chamber of Commerce, and like-minded non-profits. Hopefully, Tom's efforts will lead to effective collaborations.

It has been an honor to serve on the Board and Executive Committee with Tom for many years. He is a leader who participates enthusiastically in almost every NAMI Mercer event—from major fundraisers and conferences to committee meetings to support group picnics and volunteer lunches—always spreading good cheer and appreciation and inspiring hope.