

# SEASON'S GREETER

## Greeter Mickey Palmieri extends holiday cheer to Twin River visitors

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**Twin River Casino greeter Mickey Palmieri is joined by his family and friends in the Lincoln casino's lobby on Thursday. Palmieri, who has cerebral palsy and cannot walk or talk on his own, uses a wheelchair and personal computer equipped with a digital voice function to greet visitors to the complex.**

LINCOLN – Mickey Palmieri loves what he does for work and it shows when he's on duty at his job at the Twin River Casino.

Palmieri, who has lived with the constraints of cerebral palsy his whole life, is an official greeter at Twin River on Thursdays and works to make the days of others as good as his own from his post near the South Entrance.

Set out in front of him in his motorized wheelchair is a computer tablet, which assists him in picking out just the right digital greeting for those stopping by.

"Welcome to Twin River," is among them, as is "Thank you for coming to Twin River, enjoy the rest of your day." He also can send out "I like working here," and also the question, "What's today's job." "Not only have our guests responded to him, but he has also had an impact on our employees,"

Marc Crisafulli, executive vice president of Twin River Worldwide Holdings and Twin River Rhode Island, said of Palmieri's work. The greeter is so enthusiastic about what he does, that can't help but be felt by the people he interacts with, Crisafulli said.

Palmieri's job is the result of an effort by State Sen. Louis P. DiPalma, a deputy majority leader (and first vice chair of the Committee on Finance), and AccessPoint Rhode Island to find the disabled resident a suitable job in the work place.

Twin River stepped up to help with the job Palmieri has now held since October, according to DiPalma, who also serves on the Senate Committee on Education.

After hearing about Palmieri's needs from Rory Carmody, director of programs and development for AccessPoint, DiPalma said he made a few calls that lead to Crisafulli getting Twin River involved.

The job Palmieri ultimately obtained meets AccessPoint's goal of giving its clients full inclusion in the community through employment, housing and social interaction, according to Carmody.

The hiring also benefits Twin River through its impact on Palmieri's fellow employees, she noted. "He loves the casino and has all the spirit in the world every day he works," Carmody said. "And his co-workers 'feel how cool it was' for Twin River to hire him," she added.

Joining members of her family at Twin River to celebrate her brother's work there, Paula Pallozzi said Carmody was instrumental in working with DiPalma, and Twin River to give Mickey "this amazing opportunity."

Her brother works at the Casino from 2 p.m. and had to go through the same casino licensing and background check process all Twin River employees go through, she said. "It's good for Mickey and good for others like Mickey who want to break down today's stereotypes," she said.

Her brother lives in an AccessPoint group home and despite never having been able to walk or talk, remains very active in the Special Olympics participating in wheelchair races and softball as an athlete.

He also has a big and close-knit family to support him as was apparent with his mother, Shirley Palmieri, sisters Linda Asprinio and Kathy Palmieri, brother Mark Palmieri and other family members present in the casino's lobby.

DiPalma said the expression on Palmieri face at Twin River showed how much he likes to be there and credited Crisafulli and Twin River's staff for making his job possible.

Palmieri had worked at Comstock Industries in the past but due to changes in federal guidelines for inclusive employment under the Americans with Disabilities Act, sheltered workshops like that were no longer allowed.

"It created a challenge for us to step up and address it and this is one way to do that," DiPalma said. "If we have 4,000 companies across Rhode Island employing one person with disabilities we would have 4,000 people working," DiPalma said.

Tina Spears, executive director of the Community Provider Network of Rhode Island, said her organization seeks to give individuals with disabilities fully inclusive employment in the community like the job held by Palmieri.

"So we as a network, are looking to focus on building partnerships between our members and businesses in the community," she said. In all, there about 4,000 people in Rhode Island with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"The goal would be that for those who choose to work, we would have pathways to training programs and opportunities to be employed," she said.

AccessPoint's CEO, Tom Kane, said Palmieri's job is what he would call "customized" employment. "It's finding out what the client's skills and desires are, and then matching them with an employer who will provide them with work that is meaningful and mutually beneficial," Kane said.