



COURTESY PHOTO

The 2010 Gala Legislative Forum was held recently at the Massachusetts School of Law in Andover. Shown are moderators June Cowen, executive director of the Northeast Independent Living Program along with North Andover native James Lyons, the community development director, discussing the many years of dedication to people with disabilities.

## Legislators discuss disability issues

The Northeast Independent Living Program, and its partners, Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley, recently joined forces to host the annual Legislative Breakfast that was held at The Massachusetts School of Law in Andover.

North Andover residents with disabilities, and seniors from all across the Merrimack Valley enjoyed a personal, up-close and face-to-face dialogue with their local legislators to discuss important issues affecting the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

This year's theme was "2010: Supporting People with Disabilities in the Community." Given the competing demands for shrinking resources, the Northeast Independent Living Program and Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley are setting the pace for all to work together to provide innovative solutions that safeguard and expand programs that promote independence.

Organizers said it was a perfect time to have a meaningful dialogue that emphasized solutions rather than highlighting problems. Together, we can endure the hardship of these difficult and busy times.

Nearly the entire Merrimack Valley area legislative delegation was present for the morning's events, including Denise Johnson from the office of U.S. Rep. Niki Tsongas, D-Lowell; state Sen. Sue Tucker, D-Andover; state Sen. Steven Badour, D-Methuen; a representative from the office of state Sen. Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester; state Rep. David Torrisi, D-North Andover; state Rep. Barbara L'Italien, D-Andover; state Rep. Bill Green, D-Billerica and state Rep. Linda Dean Campbell, D-Methuen plus Joe Costanzo, administrator of the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority.

The keynote speaker was Mike Festa, executive director of The Carroll Center for the Blind.

