

# **Ken Houseknecht Named Executive Director of the Mental Health Association of Erie County, Inc.**

## ***Agency Will Celebrate 50 Years of Service in 2012***

BUFFALO, N.Y. - The board of directors of the Mental Health Association of Erie County, Inc., which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2012, has appointed Kenneth P. Houseknecht its new executive director.

Houseknecht joins the Mental Health Association (MHA) following a 30-year career in investor and public relations that included management positions with a number of publicly traded companies and a wide range of organizations on both the corporate and agency sides of business. He has also held many leadership positions with numerous not-for-profit organizations.

Ethan G. Coe, MHA board chair, said Houseknecht provides the organization with a unique blend of leadership skills, financial acumen, passion, and community contacts essential to the continued success of the Mental Health Association of Erie County. "The staff and board of directors are excited to have Ken as our new Executive Director. We look forward to working with him to advance the mission of the Mental Health Association," said Coe.

"For nearly 50 years, the Mental Health Association of Erie County has helped tens of thousands of Western New York individuals and families break the stigma associated with mental illness, while providing and linking them with a comprehensive range of vital services," said Houseknecht.

"Today, we face a great challenge - and opportunity -- as the need for the MHA's services has never been greater, while its traditional funding sources and support are under severe strain. Our board, staff, supporters, and volunteers are all focused on continuing to deliver truly essential services for many of the most vulnerable and often overlooked members of our community," Houseknecht added.

Houseknecht was senior vice president at Kei Advisors LLC prior to joining the Mental Health Association, and was vice president of communications and investor relations at Gibraltar Industries from 1996 through 2010. He has also served in leadership roles at Crowley Webb & Associates, Travers Collins, Peter J. Schmitt and Empire of America Federal Savings Bank.

Houseknecht is past president of the Mental Health Association of Erie County and was founding president of the Mental Health Association of Erie County Foundation; secretary for EduNations, a non-profit organization that has built and now operates seven schools in Africa; a former executive committee member of the Better Business Bureau of WNY; and chaired the fundraising committee for Compeer of Greater Buffalo for seven years, helping to raise more than \$300,000.

He is an accredited member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and a former board member of the organization's Buffalo/Niagara Chapter, which honored him as its "Outstanding Public Relations Practitioner" in 2001. Houseknecht is also an active member of the National Investor

Relations Institute (NIRI), where he was founding president of NIRI's second-largest chapter. He is also on the founding committee of the Western New York Investors Conference and eCycle Buffalo.

In 1996, he was honored as Compeer Volunteer of the Year. He was named Volunteer of the Year by the MHA in 1999 and he received the MHA's "Benefactor Award" in 2003. He received the "Spirit of Compeer" award in 2010.

Houseknecht earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business management and political science at Canisius College and a Master of Business Administration in marketing at Canisius.

He resides in Hamburg with his wife, Diana.

The Mental Health Association of Erie County, Inc. promotes the mental health and well-being of the community through education, public information, prevention programs and training while supporting individuals and families living with mental illness through advocacy, treatment linkage and outreach services.

The MHA provides numerous programs and services for children, adults and families throughout Erie County. Please call the Mental Health Association at (716) 886 - 1242 for more information or visit [www.eriemha.org](http://www.eriemha.org).