Berkshire Brain Injury Support Group Celebrates 30 Years
State’s First Support Group Attracts Survivors and Family Members from the Region

The Berkshire Brain Injury Support Group (BBISG) marked its 30th anniversary this past week. Special guests included founders Jean Haywood and Barbara Robinson, both of Pittsfield. The group attracts survivors of brain injury and family members from the Berkshire region, and even a few from eastern New York and southern Vermont.

“This is huge,” says Suzanne Doswell, who manages the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts’ (BIA-MA) Western Regional Office in Pittsfield. “There are very few groups that not only survive but thrive for so many years.” BBISG is one of three BIA-MA-sponsored support groups in the Berkshire region.

During the gathering, Jean Haywood reminisced of the early years when she and co-founder Barbara Robinson, Kitty Lynch and a handful of parents came together to push the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to provide help to families with loved ones who had survived a brain injury.

“These individuals were in the forefront of advocating for programs and services for survivor,” adds Doswell. “They have made a tremendous difference.”

Other attendees shared tales of the early years of support group meetings when members traveled from one family’s home to another until the group grew too large and relocated to the Center for Rehabilitation at Berkshire Medical Center, BBISG’s permanent meeting place. Mike Nolan, Director of the Rehabilitation Center, stopped by the meeting to congratulate the BBISG on its anniversary and to photograph the special occasion.

Just for fun, the group had a drawing for prizes and each was given a grab bag that included selected candies representing the thirty year period of the group. Some happily walked off with Silly Putty of days past while others had tickets for mini-golfing and one won tickets to see James Taylor at Tanglewood!

“Sadly, many of the challenges families face today are not that much different from those we faced 30 years ago,” says Doswell. “Finding medical services and knowledgeable practitioners remains an on-going effort; new group members have the same problems trying to explain their
brain injuries to family, friends and colleagues; and survivors and family members have new battles with insurance and trying to cope with reduced rehabilitation days.”

The Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA) is a private, non-profit organization that provides support services to survivors of brain injury and their families and serves as an advocate for their rights and needs. The association also offers programs to prevent brain injuries and educates the public on the risks and impact of brain injury on family and society. The Western Region has a half dozen support groups, including four in the Pittsfield area. Multiple events have been planned over the next year to celebrate the group’s 30 years. For more information or for resources, call 888-554-5553 or visit www.biama.org.