Kay the Amazing

ABC is blessed with participants and staff who enjoy a wide range of talents outside of work. This is certainly true for Kay Loftus.

Kay hails from Eyota, Minnesota where she lives with her parents. After coming to ABC in 2002 through the School to Work program, she now works at IBM in Rochester five days a week through the Ability Enterprises program. By all accounts she is a model worker, despite her learning, speech and mobility challenges.

“Kay is great at always making people smile. She loves to show off things that matter to her most, like her art,” said Emily Ellingworth, Kay’s Coordinator at ABC. “She brings lots of positivity to our work environment. She loves to greet people with a thumbs-up, handshake or a big smile. She’s great at bringing people together,” Emily added.

Kay is truly a social butterfly. She is well-liked by her coworkers and other IBM employees and loves to meet new people. She credits ABC with fostering greater independence and improving her social skills.

Without ABC Kay would miss out on all of her social connections, her work and her daily activities. She learns a lot every day. ABC taught her the importance of coming to work each day and working hard. She is particularly grateful for the lessons she has learned and the support she receives from her job coach, JoAnn.

After arriving around 11:15 am, Kay stows her things and has lunch in the IBM cafeteria with other employees until it is time to start work. With JoAnn’s help, she sorts silverware before running it through the dishwasher. She also uses an adaptive spray device to wash tables and then wipes them dry. Once she finishes work she and JoAnn leave IBM to begin their daily recreational activity.

Often this involves working on her art. Kay loves working with JoAnn or her mother on her many art projects.

Kay is an accomplished artist, working in a wide range of mediums. She has won numerous awards for her paintings, textiles and collages. Inspired by weekly art class she took some 15 years ago, she began experimenting with different forms of expression. Kay mostly uses her natural talent, which is what makes her art so lively.

This year marked her 15th submitting artwork to the Arts and Abilities exhibit at Mayo Clinic. She has had her artwork featured numerous times and won several awards. This year she took home top honors in the Fiber Arts category for her mixed media piece entitled “Nature’s Beauty” (photo above).

Art is just one of Kay’s many activities outside of work. She takes yoga classes at Mayo’s Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center (DAHLC), plays music, sings, plays video games, watches movies and goes bowling or to the mall with her friends.

Kay looks forward to participating in Arts and Ability again next year and is currently brainstorming ideas for next year’s entry. All of us at ABC can’t wait to see what she comes up with next!

In Memory of Audrey Stadtler

Audrey Stadtler began her career at ABC as the manager for Twice Is Nice in Caledonia at Woodland Industries. She enjoyed training participants to work in the store and shared in their enthusiasm when they gained independence. Audrey also worked at ABC’s residential program located in Spring Grove MN, where she cared for two ladies in their home environment. After retiring from Woodland Industries, she continued to work at the home until she passed on August 23, 2017. Audrey truly enjoyed time spent with her family, especially her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Audrey will forever be in our hearts and dearly missed by all.
The bonds between Dooley’s and ABC were first forged in 1993 when Tom Murphy first hired an ABC crew to work at McMurphy’s Sports Cafe. When McMurphy’s evolved into Dooley’s in 2010, ABC was there as its cleaning crew.

Every Monday through Friday since then, the ABC team has arrived early in the morning and worked until just before Dooley’s opens for lunch — cleaning and prepping the facility for a busy day and night ahead.

Tory Runkle, one of the current owners, loves the team’s attention to detail, “It lets me focus on other important aspects of running the business. Thanks to the ABC crew I know things will be ready to go by the time we open.”

It probably doesn’t hurt that Dan Wethington brings Tory his morning coffee every day, “whether I want it or not,” Tory added smiling. It’s a routine that both would miss if ABC wasn’t there. Tory first started working for Tom when he was just a teenager and has fond memories of working with the ABC team.

The ABC crew also loves working at Dooley’s and it’s clear they all feel part of the Dooley’s team. Over the years they have celebrated many milestones together. This becomes immediately apparent when inspecting the photos covering the walls in Tory’s office, many of which include crew members.

“The holiday parties were legendary back in the Tom Murphy days,” says Kaye Johnson. Kaye was a member of the original team in 1993 and remains with ABC today.

She remembers the birthday parties, lunches, and outings of which the ABC team was a part. “They really cared about everyone on the crew and included them in everything,” Kaye recalls. Until recently she would bring some of the retired crew members to lunch at Dooley’s on St. Patrick’s Day to visit and reminisce about the good times they shared.

There have been many memories and accomplishments throughout the years. In 1995 Dooley’s was honored at the annual ABC banquet as its Community Employer of the Year. In 2013 a retirement party was held at Dooley’s for Rolf Axelson — the last member of the original crew to retire.

Although it remains a mystery why or what his motivations were, it is clear to everyone that Tom Murphy had an undeniable love for the participants at ABC. He was caring and protective of them, and never wavered in his desire that they work at Dooley’s.

Since Murphy’s passing in 2014, Tory has stepped up to the plate to continue Tom’s legacy. With a daughter of his own who is autistic, Tory is an advocate for finding the abilities in others. He also works with Autism Awareness and The Team 25 Foundation.

Next time you’re at Dooley’s having lunch or watching a game with friends, pause a moment to reflect on who mopped the floors, cleaned the restrooms, and who will be sweeping up the popcorn after you’re gone!

Both Tory and ABC look forward to many more years and memories with current and future crews.
With a theme of “Soaring to New Heights,” the eagle spirit was on display at the banquets in Rochester on October 10 and in Houston County on October 26. It was another year of record attendance, with more guests than ever on hand to help us recognize the accomplishments of participants, staff and volunteers!

2017 AWARD BANQUETS

Below: The Rochester Banquet on October 10. Clockwise from upper left: Lowry Award winners; ABC Board President Patty Simcox with Rochester Mayor Ardell Brede; Executive Director Bruce Remme addresses the crowd; Community Partner of the Year Award winner Midwest Manufacturing; Volunteer of the Year Award recipient Jon Gullixson; Business Partner of the Year Award winner Rochester Athletic Club; Outstanding Volunteer Service Award recipient Steve Kann. Photos by Mary Eickemeyer and Jane Kreidermacher.

Below: The Houston County Banquet on October 26. Clockwise from upper left: Eagle mascot Kim Wiese with Bruce Remme; WOW award winners; Jakob Terpstra, ABC Works Employee of the Year, receives his award from Cathy McCabe; representatives from Hammell & Murphy Law Firm, Woodland Industries Employer of the Year, with Helen Olson; Laurie Kellagher, Judy Johnson, Dick Kerndt and Kellie Wendland tune in to the Facebook live feed; guests arriving; and Travis Gordon receives the Vicki Wilkes Spirit of Independence Award from Danielle Burg. Not pictured - ABC Works Employer of the Year, L&M Tap. Photos by Cindy Andrews.
Ironwood Springs Wins MN Disability Employer of the Year Award

At a ceremony in Stewartville on October 16, Ironwood Springs Christian Ranch was presented with an award from the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR) recognizing the organization as an Outstanding Employer of people with disabilities.

Nominated by Ability Building Center (ABC), Ironwood Springs was selected by MOHR to receive the award in conjunction with National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October.

ABC crews have worked at Ironwood since 1998. The organization was featured in the Spring 2017 issue of InsideABC.

ABC Executive Director Bruce Remme presented the award to Camp Director Bob Bardwell on behalf of MOHR’s President Mike Burke.

Senator Carla Nelson also presented Ironwood Springs with a certificate of recognition from the Minnesota State Senate recognizing the award and congratulating the organization for its contributions to the region.

MOHR represents more than 110 disability service providers across the state. MOHR’s mission is to advocate and support its nonprofit members in providing meaningful services to persons with disabilities and communities served. Members are committed to respect for each individual, a person-centered approach and expanding work opportunities.

Celebrated every October, this year’s theme for National Disability Employment Awareness Month is “Inclusion Drives Innovation.”

Timmerman Receives President’s Award

On November 8, ABC Board President Patty Simcox presented Vocational Services Program Manager Sarah Timmerman with the President’s Award for Excellence, “in recognition of her invaluable contribution and loyal devotion to ABC.” Sarah has been instrumental in a number of recent ABC service quality improvement initiatives. Congratulations Sarah on a well-earned award!

Congratulations to Our Latest Lowry Award Winners!

Nathan Emery
Nathan works at Charter, where he does a great job checking with the supervisors and managers to see what they need done during the day. Nathan’s willingness to learn new tasks helped him get hired directly by Charter. He is a great example of what can be achieved when you put your mind to it and a role model to all when it comes to setting and achieving goals!

Dawn Olson
Dawn is a hard-working and positive member of the ABC Team. Dawn does a great job getting right to work when she starts her day — she knows her routine and does it well. She will hug her co-workers and offer them encouragement when they are feeling down. ABC is proud of Dawn and her accomplishments and delighted she is recognized for her hard work!
ABC Looks to Acquire Passenger Van

ABC has been able to secure a grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation to enable purchase of a badly needed large passenger van. The value of the van is $66,259 — DOT funds 80% of the total cost, with ABC responsible for the balance of $13,251. Please help ABC raise the remainder by donating today in the reply envelope included or online at abcinc.org/donate. Thank you for your support!
Barrett’s Story

Production Coordinator for ABC, Barrett Evenstad first joined ABC in October of 2015 as Assistant Manager of the Ability Built Computers program.

At that time he had served in the Minnesota Army National Guard for four years — enlisting in the infantry for two years and then working to commission as an Infantry Officer while finishing his degree at Minnesota State University - Mankato.

After graduating in December 2014, Barrett spent the first six months of 2015 training with the military. Once completed, he moved to Rochester with his future wife Brogan. She went to work at the Rochester Center for Autism and Barrett at ABC. They were married in 2015.

Barrett continued his monthly drills with Bravo Company, 2-135 in Rochester. Barrett had been working in Ability Built for about five months when he got the orders from his Commander to mobilize to the Egypt’s Sinai Desert.

During his time in Egypt, Barrett stayed in regular contact with ABC to send pictures and get updates on the organization. “It was always conveyed to me that everyone couldn’t wait to have me back, which was a really good feeling to have from five thousand miles away,” he recalled.

Fortunately everything went smoothly overseas and Barrett rejoined the ABC ranks on August 1, 2017, with a new position as Production Coordinator.

Barrett added, “If there is one thing I’ve learned over the past few years, ABC will always go above and beyond what is expected of an employer to accommodate the needs of any military member; and for that, I thank you!”

Join Barrett on Team ABC!

Are you feeling fulfilled in your work life? If not, consider a career as a job coach or program assistant with ABC, working alongside people with disabilities and completing contracts for our partners. Coaching is a little like teaching, a little like counseling, and a lot like no other kind of job!

We invite you to review our open positions at www.abcinc.org and complete your application online. You can also stop by any ABC location to pick up and complete an application.

Happy holidays from all of us at ABC and best wishes for peace and happiness in the New Year!