Amy left for Baltimore on June 17 to meet up with other Special Olympians from across the USA. From Baltimore, Team USA set out for Greece by way of a fuel stop in Ireland. Upon their arrival in Greece, the team headed to the Island of Rhodes, where for four days they would continue their training and get acclimated to their surroundings. Then it was off to Athens, where on June 25th opening ceremonies were held. Amy remembers the ceremony as an exciting but tiring 5-hour event that kept her and her teammates up later than they were used to. To make matters worse, the 1AM end time of the opening ceremony was further extended (the team finally got back to their hotel at 4AM!) by what Amy described as a “messed-up bus system.” Amy was relieved that, unlike some of her new teammates, she wasn’t scheduled to compete that next day. Phew! In fact, over those first couple of days of competition Amy had no events to compete in herself, so she continued to train while giving herself plenty of time to be a good Olympian – watching her Team USA teammates as they competed, cheering them on and being there for them regardless of wins or losses. Finally it was time for the events that Amy had trained so hard and come so far to compete in - the 50-meter backstroke and the 50-meter freestyle. After swimming a preliminary race in each event, Amy gave it everything she had and finished strong, claiming a bronze medal in the backstroke and placing second in the free-style event - earning Amy an Olympic silver medal! Amy also competed in a 4-person 50-meter freestyle relay with some of her new Team USA teammates.

On July 4th, following some sight-seeing that included a trip to the Acropolis, Team USA joined all the other nations’ Special Olympians to close the Athens Games. At this traditional parade of Olympic athletes, Amy wore her medals with a sense of accomplishment, and a hint of well-deserved pride. Reflecting on her trip to Greece and her exciting experience as an Olympian, Amy said, “I was excited and scared at the same time! It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I would do it again in a heartbeat!”
On October 4, 2011, the International Star Registry designated star number Orion R A 5h 28m 1s D-10° 27” to the name Ability Building Center. This will be on registry in the vault in Switzerland and registered in a book in the copyright office of the United States of America.

The Banquets

It’s a feeling like no other; these banquets are ABC’s Oscar nights, when all the stars shine!

Board member Steve Kann said of the 2011 banquets, “It is truly heart warming to see how excited our clients are when they receive their service awards, which are small gifts of appreciation. Some of them react like they’ve just won the lottery. All of their friends are clapping, family members are crying—including me.”

He adds, “Occasionally a client will grab the microphone and thank their parents, God, and their supervisors for helping them have the opportunity to work. I tell you, it just doesn’t get better than that.”
Grant Helps People With Disabilities Expand Computer Re-use Program

Steve Kann and IBM other volunteers support Ability Building Center

(Reprinted with permission from IBM’s Publications Team in New York)

Steve Kann, a 23 year veteran of IBM who has served on the Board of Directors at Ability Building Center for 7 years said, “I have never been prouder of an IBM team than I was on our Celebration of Service Day.”

Earlier in 2011, Steve and Ability Building Center (ABC) were awarded an IBM Catalyst Grant for the work they would begin on June 15, 2011—IBM’s Celebration of Service Day, when IBM employees and retirees around the world came together to volunteer their time and expertise to make a difference in their communities. On that day, Steve and more than 50 IBM volunteers worked side by side with ABC clients—people with disabilities—to refurbish used computer technology and distribute the equipment to others with disabilities, to organizations that support them, and to eligible individuals with limited access to technology. The team also helped first-time users understand computer basics. Skills in demand IBM in Minnesota and Ability Building Center have been partners since ABC’s founding in 1956. Steve, who has been on the board for six years and served a term as President, is following a long line of IBM volunteers who have contributed to helping ABC and its clients over the decades. ABC clients are people with mental illness, hearing and visual impairments, physiological and neurological challenges, and other intellectual or developmental disabilities or special needs. The skills and services of ABC’s clients are employed by companies throughout the area for assignments such as confidential document imaging, mailing assistance, sewing, cashiering, and computer refurbishing. “ABC has clients working at the IBM site in Rochester doing various jobs like delivering mail, working in the cafeteria and lunch room, and doing errand delivery services,” says Steve. “ABC clients are highly visible on site, so a large number of IBM employees have gained a true appreciation for all that they are capable of doing. I’ve been close friends with the ABC clients throughout all these years.”

Building Lasting Relationships

On a crisp November morning, ABC hosted a wonderful Benefactors Breakfast to celebrate and thank our generous Benefactors. Even though it is an early start to the day for many, we had over 70 Benefactors, staff, and guests in attendance. This event gives ABC a chance to thank our many Benefactors and Volunteers for all they do to keep our mission alive and to hear stories from participants, Volunteers, and fellow Benefactors on how they feel about their association with ABC.

“I am proud to be a Benefactor for ABC because I know firsthand how well this organization is run and ABC truly keeps our mission in focus. Who cannot love an organization that works so hard to help others less fortunate?”

—Steve Kann

Charles Crawford spoke about his enthusiasm for working in the Ability Built Computers program and how much that job has meant for him over the past 2 years. Steve Conners shared why he chooses to volunteer his time running the Ability Built Computers program and why that program is so special for our participants. Steve Kann gave a moving testimonial on what it means to be a Benefactor for ABC. He even had his 12 year old daughter Maria, who has Down Syndrome, participate in his talk, explaining that someday he hoped she would have a chance to work at ABC... since they are so close to his heart.

visit www.abcinc.org/Volunteer to learn more about how to become a volunteer at ABC
Sock’s the Word! At Woodland

Woodland Industries recently teamed up with Lifestyle Medical Group of Caledonia to assist them in labeling the packages for their Smooth-Toe® Compression Socks. Owners Greg Hoscheit and Damian Loth recently moved the company to Caledonia and have been in business since 2003. The compression sock stimulates blood flow which increases circulation, and helps with tired, sore or swollen feet. The increased circulation also prevents heavy, tired legs that come from standing at work, giving an energizing effect. Woodland Industries has been labeling SmoothToe® Energizing Socks that are shipped to Mayo Clinic, several VA clinics/hospitals, major airlines, as well as distributors in Canada and the UK.

SmoothToe® Socks have an unprecedented 5 year Replacement Warranty – if you get any holes, they replace your socks. SmoothToe® is made from the highest quality Coolmax yarn and is proudly Made in the USA. They are extremely popular because they’re more comfortable and easier to put on than other compression socks.

Greg and Damian also own V02FX, which is an athletic compression sock brand. We are looking forward to assisting Lifestyle Medical Group with their packaging needs in the future.

ABC Rochester’s Ability Options Relocates

Ability Options (AO) has moved! AO is now located back where it started - in the ABC building. The decision to move AO back to ABC was made after the Paperless Office Solutions space became available. Having AO in the ABC building provides better access to various resources within ABC including: PACTT, staffing support, and custodial services. The AO program also hopes to attract participants from other departments within the building who might be interested in a rec/leisure program part-time while continuing to work. The move also means improved community involvement in terms of easy access to the city bus line, level ground for walks around the neighborhood, and better access to ABC transportation for community access.

Community access and integration activities take place almost every day in the AO program. Examples of community activities include: volunteering, shopping, going out for coffee, visiting the library, and going for walks or picnics. Other daily activities include: physical activities, cooking and baking, arts and crafts, stories and reading, music and dance, discussion activities, and computer activities. AO participant favorites include: Spa Day, Bingo, Marble Art, and going out for coffee.

Currently 18 participants are served in the AO program, some of whom also work part-time. The program is likely to grow to serve more people as the population of retirees continues to grow.
On November 6, 1980 Mike Schiltz began his career at Houston County Development Center in Caledonia. Mike worked at a variety of community sites in Houston County performing janitorial duties and worked in-center on the button and flyer production. In later years Mike participated in the Options to Work program and began to lead a more leisurely lifestyle. Due to health issues he retired from ABC Works on August 23, 2010. Mike passed away October 2, 2011. He was a very special person and will be missed by all who knew him. You will be missed Mike.

Way to go, Laraine!

Since May 12, 2005, Steve Hulbert has worked on many sites including the Courtyard by Marriott, Mayo Waste Recycling, Guest House Inn and Suites, and he recently started filling in on the Stewartville Schools custodial crew. When not on an ABC crew, he works independently at the Guest House on weekends. He is always willing to fill in on other sites when his skills are needed. Steve’s flexibility, positive attitude and high quality standards make him valuable to any job site! Steve received ABC’s prestigious Lowry Award in February.

You’re the Man, Steve!

Blake Mossbarger started working at ABC Works in 1982. On July 19, 2011 Blake passed away. We will all remember Blake as the fun-loving guy who just loved to make people laugh. A huge smile would cross Blake’s face when he played a joke on you and he would do anything just to get a little laugh out of anyone, especially if they were having a bad day. Blake had a bright smile and a wonderful sense of humor! He enjoyed listening to music and he would put his finger up like he was conducting the band and they were all waiting on him to start. It was never a dull day with Blake around, with the practical jokes, loud music, and his great dance moves.

We will miss you Blakers.

Walter Scheck passed away on May 16, 2011. Walter worked at ABC for over 20 years! Kissing the hands of young women and making every girl’s heart melt was Walter’s special talent! He was always a gentleman and made everyone feel special around him. Walter greeted everyone everyday with a smile and a handshake. Walter was a very social person; he made friends where ever he would go. Walter loved working at ABC and also at the Hokah Kwik Trip.

We will all miss Walter’s friendly smile and loving heart.

Visit www.abcinc.org/tributes for more tributes and memorials
Impacts of the State of Minnesota Government “Shut Down”

As we approached the end of June, 2011 it was becoming apparent that a shut-down of Minnesota State government was very likely to occur. Many were hopeful that a resolution to the budget crisis could be achieved before the deadline, but the legislature and Governor were in a political gridlock and resolution was not achieved.

As we entered the shut-down, ABC had no idea if any of the services or programs we provide would be “deemed essential.” This is an important designation, since without being “deemed essential”, all state funding for our services would be cut off. We anticipated that if we lost all our state funding it would result in a $35,000-$40,000 loss in revenue every day. With those kinds of losses it wouldn’t take long to put programs like ABC out of business.

ABC responded to the situation by making a decision to continue providing all services and programs except Vocational Evaluation, Work Adjustment Training, and Competitive Placement - all programs funded by the Rehabilitation Services branch of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). DEED had already cancelled all service authorizations and stopped all referrals prior to the date of the shut-down. In addition, ABC had implemented a hiring freeze two weeks prior to the shut-down, and during the time of the shut-down all staff were furloughed 8 hours per week. However, staff were allowed to take their earned “annual leave” to make up the 8 hours if they had the time accumulated.

Following the shut-down with the new budget proposal, we learned that both our Extended Employment, and Day Training and Habilitation programs did receive cuts to their unit rates. Although the cuts were less than two percent, this was the third year in a row that ABC received funding reductions for these services.

The shut down certainly was an unpleasant experience resulting in a lot of confusion and uncertainty. However, with the very positive response of our staff and Board of Directors, we continued operations and none of the people receiving services from ABC experienced a program disruption or shortened hours in programming or service.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff, the Board of Directors, and our community stakeholders for their support during this difficult time and for making it possible for ABC to continue its mission without disruption.

-Steve Hill; Executive Director

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