For Dave Mooney, every day is a new opportunity. Dave was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on October 30, 1968 to proud parents Duane and Susan (Harlow) Mooney. As Dave adds, “I believe I was ‘the apple of their eye’ on that day.”

Dave was blessed with a sister when he was sixteen. His baby sister, Jennifer, currently lives in Oklahoma. The first eighteen years of Dave’s life were spent moving around. The family lived in California and Seattle, and just before his senior year Dave moved back to Oklahoma with his mom. This gave Dave the chance to graduate from the same high school that his parents attended.

On August 21, 1987, when Dave was just 18, an accidental fall down an elevator shaft resulted in a traumatic brain injury. Following one year at a Tulsa, Oklahoma hospital, Dave attended rehabilitation programs in Colorado, Oregon, and Minnesota. Dave attended the Mayo brain injury rehabilitation program and graduated on March 21, 1996, nearly 10 years after his accident.

Following completion of the Mayo program, Dave came to ABC and has worked in many areas over the years. Dave currently participates in Abilities Unlimited programming each morning, where he is involved in social activity time and has told staff he wants to be “more than just a participant”.

Dave likes to help staff, as well as other program participants. He assists staff in pushing others in wheelchairs to group activities or while on outings. He is a leader among Abilities Unlimited program participants. He spends his afternoons working in the Mayo Medical Labs box-building area and other work readiness activities. Dave and the staff in AU are currently looking into opportunities for him to volunteer in the community. He sees volunteering as an opportunity to give back to the community that has helped him.

Dave enjoys visits with his parents (mom resides in Oklahoma and dad in Montana), his time here in Rochester with friends, and active involvement with his church on weekends.

At the annual Rochester employee appreciation banquet in October, Dave gave this invocation: “When asked if I would give the invocation for this evening’s celebration, I felt quite honored. As I look at myself as being one small piece of the puzzle, yet looking around the room, I believe that we add up to a pretty good bunch. We all know that victories, great and small, do not happen overnight. It is so important to honor the hard work that makes this progress possible, and give positive reflection on those men and women who have paved the way. Tonight is a celebration of those giving and receiving.”
New Board Members make a difference

Ability Building Center welcomes Patty Simcox and Kreg Kauffman to its Board of Directors.

Patty is a teacher at Century High School in Rochester and works primarily with autistic students. She was also a special education teacher in the Phoenix, Arizona school district for several years. She has experience working at several facilities that provide programs and services for people with disabilities, including Rise, Inc. (Anoka, MN), WACOSA (St. Cloud, MN), and group homes in Houston County.

Kreg has been working with injured persons and their families for over 30 years. He specializes in negotiating, settling, and trying claims involving all areas of personal injury and wrongful death. Kreg has been a requested speaker at the Mayo Clinic Annual Brain Injury Conference, the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota State Conference, and the Rochester Brain Injury Community Committee Conference.

Kreg and his wife Georgia have two adult children: Kate and Alex. They enjoy sports and spending time on the Mississippi River.
On December 3rd, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Rochester hosted their annual Christmas dinner for ABC participants.

This year’s dinner guests were the participants of the Extended Employment Program. Participants from ABC Rochester’s Center-Based and Supported Employment programs enjoyed the hospitality and fellowship of the church members.

The Gloria Dei dinner has become such a tradition among ABC’ers over the years, that now, about half of the people who want to go, get to go, and the other half must wait to go to next year’s dinner!

Gloria Dei, assisted by Mayo High School, serves a dinner that consists of traditional Christmas foods, and they also provide entertainment. Santa always makes a visit, providing laughs and a gift for every ABC’er. The Church has made this dinner for ABC a mission project each year.

This year ABC offered up a big thank you with a plaque acknowledging their years of generosity. We are grateful for this annual get-together. For ABC participants, this is a highlight and tradition of the holiday season.

For more than 10 years Ability Building Center has had a crew on-site in the cafeteria and dishroom at Rochester Community and Technical College. The team busses tables, washes dishes, refills condiments, and performs various other tasks. Within the last couple of years, they have taken it upon themselves to greet students each morning at the main entrance.

In 2008, RCTC gave each of the ABC employees a plaque to commemorate their hard work and dedication. At the 2009 ABC Rochester benefactors breakfast, Renee Engelmeyer from RCTC presented ABC with the Partnership Award. The award highlights not just the team at RCTC, but ABC as a business.

ABC thanks RCTC for this award and partnership, as it gives our crew the opportunity to establish work skills, forge relationships with students and faculty members, as well as give back to the community.
Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center: Business Partner of the Year

Already in its second year, the partnership between Mayo’s fitness facility and ABC is proving to be a great fit for both. In the locker rooms and out on the fitness floors at both locations of the world-class fitness facility, ABC workers from all three vocational programs work 7 days a week to keep the exercise equipment clean and locker room spaces fresh and orderly. And the feedback we get from our Mayo partners and their members indicates that the ABC crews and individuals bring something more to the job than just strong work skills.

The partnership is a benefit to both parties as it empowers ABC’ers while giving the DAHLC fitness staff the time they need to provide the best possible experience for their members.

Ironwood Springs Christian Ranch: Community Employer of the Year

The Miracle Lodge at Ironwood Springs, which is used for retreats, family gatherings, and other events, employs a team of four Supported Employment participants and a job coach.

Each Monday the team takes the scenic drive to the ranch, where they freshen up the rooms and public spaces for guests of the lodge.

Job coaches who work with the team describe it this way: “Ironwood Springs is a very warm, receptive environment.”

Lowry Award Winners Make A Difference

The Lowry Award is given bi-monthly to recognize workers in any ABC Rochester vocational program for their outstanding progress towards goals, and improvement in overall work performance.

2009 recipients of the Lowry award were also honored to serve as hosts and hostesses at this year’s banquet, where the theme for the evening was “Catch the Spirit.”

Clearly, these six had already caught the spirit!

2009 Lowry award winners from left to right: Chip, Paul, Jennifer, Denise, Joann, and Lang (inset)

Ryan Eastman and Amanda Holloway from Mayo’s Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center with two members of the crew

Ranch owner Bob Bardwell with members of ABC’s Ironwood Springs Crew
On October 29th we held our annual Houston County Recognition Banquet at the Four Seasons Center in Caledonia. Our theme this year was “Achieving Success”. The program featured an eagle soaring through the open sky. Like the eagle, our participants, through our commitment as a team, soar to great heights.

The Employer of the Year for ABC Works was River Valley Sprouts. Since 1992, River Valley Sprouts has given the crew the responsibility of prepping, bagging and packaging shallots and garlic in-center and on site in rural Houston.

Woodland Industries Employer of the Year, Caledonia Haulers, has provided custodial employment opportunities to four Woodland Industries participants and a job coach. The team of four works Wednesday evenings, learning the employer’s expectations, quality, community work and pride in being able to learn new skills. Not only does Haulers provide Woodland Industries with a worksite, but they also provide us with a positive, friendly work environment.

For over 25 years Woodland Industries and APN have been business partners in the production of polishing pads. APN gives the participants at Woodland Industries the opportunity to learn general production skills such as measuring, hands-on assembly, running a drill press, and performing quality work. It is not only the longevity of our relationship that makes APN the right choice for Business Partner of the Year, but the respect and loyalty that APN has shown to our participants over the years.

The Employee of the Year Award for Woodland Industries went to Karli Harguth. Karli is a person who always has a smile on her face and will go out of her way to say good morning to everyone, has demonstrated that she can work independently as well as part of a team, has a positive attitude and is always eager to work.

The ABC Works Employee of the Year award went to Brent Wieser. Brent works in-center on many jobs and makes boxes at Bauer’s Nursery 5 days a week. He has really matured and developed a great work ethic, is well known in the community and everyone enjoys his enthusiasm for life.

The Vicki Wilkes Spirit of Independence Award winner this year was Brenda Whitmore from ABC Works. Brenda works at Subway in Winona and cleans at the LaCrescent Merchants Bank five days a week.

We thank all of our employers and are looking forward to making these partnerships stronger!
Patricia “Tricia” Irlbeck passed away on October 1, 2009, after a brief, courageous battle with cancer. In February 1992, Tricia joined the Ability Enterprises program of ABC. When she came, she already had a part-time afternoon job in the laundry room at a nursing home in Stewartville. In the mornings she worked on an AE enclave at a commercial laundry. In March 1997 Tricia had a job change and started a 12-year career as a dining room attendant at the Mayo Clinic patient cafeteria. Her primary job was washing tables. Tricia worked on this enclave until she retired in July 2009.

No matter where she was, Tricia was a dedicated employee. She liked to stay busy. She was proud of her work. Employees and customers of the cafeteria could always depend on a smile, a wave and a “Hi” from Tricia. When cafeteria customers were finished eating Tricia would take their trays. She responded to their thanks with her big smile. When Tricia’s co-workers hear she passed away they were sad that she had left them so fast. Soon they were sharing stories of how Tricia liked to thoroughly rinse her table washing cloth in the sanitized water, have mashed potatoes and gravy every day for lunch, wipe a male peer’s face when he was done eating, and how much she loved her family and her dogs, Duke and Lucky.

Patricia is survived by her mother, Marijane, of Racine, and 6 siblings, as well as many nieces and nephews. She is dearly missed by family and all who were better to have had Tricia in their lives.
**Tributes and Memorials**

**William “Bill” Bliesmer** passed away on November 19, 2009. Bill worked at ABC for 26 years. He started in 1982 in the Long-Term Supported Employment program. While in this program Bill did assembly work. Notes from his job coach talk about his attention to detail and ability to assemble complicated pieces with good quality. In August 1999 Bill moved into Ability Enterprises. While at Ability Enterprises he had many jobs in the community, wrapping silverware at a restaurant and doing laundry at two different hotels. If Bill happened to be working in-center at AE he would walk down to the cafeteria break or lunch time to get a pop. During this time he’d often make the rounds looking for those familiar faces from his days in Long-Term Supported Employment. He’d also go into the Administrative areas of ABC looking for some more ABC “old timer” staff.

In July 2006 Bill hung up his work gloves and transitioned into the Ability Options leisure program. While at AO Bill could be found listening to the radio while doing his Hidden Word Puzzles. Occasionally, he joined in for a game of Bingo, too. Bill officially retired from ABC in February 2008.

At Bill’s visitation there were picture boards full of photos of Bill with his family and friends, on vacations and fishing. There were also a few newspaper articles. One article, on yellowed newsprint, talked about Bill’s promotions through work areas of ABC. A quote at the end of the article was from his sister, talking about ABC being one of the best things that ever happened to Bill.

**Teresa Cavey** passed away on November 24, 2009. She had received ABC services beginning in May of 1981, and served through several programs including Vocational Evaluation, Work Adjustment Training, Center-Based Employment, Supported Employment, and Ability Enterprises. A voice from the past, former ABC staff member Mark Kolb, worked with Teresa when she was a part of the IBM dish crew, and has some warm memories of her.

“Teresa's smile invited friendships wherever she went. She never said a bad thing about anyone and I wonder if she never said a bad thing because she never had a bad thought about anyone.” Kolb went on to say, “She represented herself as a friendly individual doing the best she could daily. I don't remember a time she wasn't giving her work her best effort. Teresa will be missed by her friends at ABC.”

**Nancy Ryan** passed away peacefully in her sleep on January 10, 2010. At the ABC Banquet in October 2009, Nancy was recognized for 30 Years of Service at ABC. Nancy was not able to attend the banquet, but the group still gave her a big round of applause.

Nancy started her ABC career in July 1979 in the Work Activity Center. In October of 1992 she transferred to the Long Term Employment program and in September 1994 she moved to Ability Enterprises. She was in AE until she retired the end of October 2009. Through AE Nancy had the opportunity to work in a variety of business in the community. She worked in a dish room, wrapped silverware, and did restaurant and hotel laundry work. For about the last 5 years in AE Nancy worked in-center doing assembly work, confidential paper shredding, preparing paper for shredding and bulk mailing tasks. Nancy took pride in her work. She worked at a slow, steady pace, with a perfect finished product. There was no hurrying Nancy; she liked the pace of her life, and she had definite opinions about what she wanted out of life.

A favorite memory of some of Nancy’s co-workers and housemates are of her Retirement Party in November 2009. The party was held at the nursing home where Nancy had recently moved. Some of Nancy’s co-workers hadn’t seen her for several months and were glad to see her. The tear that rolled down Nancy’s cheek during the party told everyone there how much she enjoyed being surrounded by people that she spent every day with for so many years.
The skilled sewing departments at ABC and Woodland Industries would like to create an expertly-tailored, hand-crafted teddy bear for you, made from any article of clothing. Call 507-281-6262 or stop in today at either location to order your bear and create a memory.