Two athletes, two different sports, one goal!

Deb Stennes (left) works on one of ABC’s Supported Employment crews at a local hotel. She has been chosen as the only female from Region 10 Area Special Olympics to play basketball in the 2007 Special Olympics World Games which will be held in Shanghai, China.

Allie Hostetter (below) is one of four Special Olympics “Mushers” in Minnesota. Allie is preparing for the John Beargrease Dog Sled Marathon Sprints.
From the Desk of the Executive Director
Steve Hill

Reflections on accomplishment

There were several events that could be included in the highlights for 2006.

Certainly the special events that we held to celebrate ABC’s fiftieth anniversary would have to top the list. However, since I reviewed those events in the last newsletter in December, this newsletter will focus on other highlights and accomplishments from 2006.

During 2006 ABC served 880 individuals with disabilities throughout SE Minnesota. That represents a 6% increase in the number of persons served over 2005. One perspective on the number of people served is that it’s a great accomplishment for ABC. The argument could certainly be made that the efforts of our funders, board members, staff, employers, volunteers and donors all made substantial contributions to provide the opportunities and support to provide a meaningful program to 880 individuals last year. Indeed, that happened and we should all be grateful for the great effort. However, let's not forget the valiant and substantial effort that all the individuals we serve at ABC put into making their programs and lives successful.

This newsletter has isolated five great individual success stories of some amazing people that have accomplished significant milestones in their lives, because they have developed their talents through dedication and hard work. How many people do you work with that are athletes that have been invited to compete on an international level? Read on in this newsletter and learn about two that I happen to have the privilege to know through ABC. There are three other individuals recognized in stories contained in the newsletter that have made outstanding progress in their work areas, ABC’s Lowry Award Winners and Woodland’s Outstanding Worker Award Winners.

All the individuals featured in our newsletter deserve all the credit for their accomplishments, as do the other 875 individuals that happened to receive services through ABC last year and experienced those day to day successes and accomplishments that we sometimes take for granted. To these coworkers, I say Thank You for the inspiration you give and the great contributions you’ve made to ABC and our community.
Two athletes, two different sports, one goal!

When it comes to basketball, there is no one more passionate about the sport than Deb Stennes. Deb, who works on one of ABC’s Supported Employment crews at a local hotel, has been chosen as the only female from Region 10 Area Special Olympics to play basketball in the 2007 Special Olympics World Games in Shanghai, China.

Stennes, who has played basketball since her childhood growing up in Mabel, Minnesota, was introduced to Special Olympics when she and her twin sister Mary moved to Rochester following graduation from Lanesboro High School. “We both started playing basketball for Special Olympics in 1987. Mary and I played in 1991 in the Twin Cities at Gopher Arena. Our team came home with third place. Mary died in a drowning accident in 1992.” Deb will attend a basketball camp this summer in Tennessee to help prepare for the games. When asked, “When are the games”? Deb answers “September 25 - October 11, 2007.”

Mark Kolb, Deb’s Program Coordinator said, “It is exciting to hear that she will be going to China to participate in the Special Olympics on the international level. Deb is always passionate about the things she involves herself in. At work she takes the initiative to supply the cleaning cart so the housekeeping crew gets off to a good start every morning. If Deb is playing basketball she is playing as hard as she can and trying to be the best team player possible. That sounds so much like the Deb we see at work. Being a team player is a great asset to have at work and play.”

Snow is one word that Allie Hostetter loves to hear! The more snow the better for Allie and the husky team from Spirit of the Wolf Kennels, that she’s been training. Allie, a senior at John Marshall, works in ABC’s main building three days a week through the School to Work Transition program and has been a Special Olympics athlete since she was 8, competing in swimming, track and field and other sports. Allie was invited as one of four to compete in the sprints this year at the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon in Duluth, Minnesota.

If you ask Allie to sit down and talk a minute or two about the dogs and the race, a big smile comes across her face and she says, “Sure, what do you want to know?” “What is it like standing on the back of the sled?” “It was hard at first, you have to get to know the dogs and how to talk to them,” Allie said. “At first when I was on the sled, it was very scary. You have to hold on tight.” Now it’s better and I’m used to the sled and the dogs.” When she shouts, “Ready! Let’s go!” Lobo, Waya (pronounced “O-ya”), Oshnia and Wonkan Tonka (“Tank” for short) put all four paws down and “launch” from a stand still into a run. “The thing I like best is getting to run the dogs.” What have you learned since you began training? “You have to dress in layers to stay warm because standing on the back of the sled gets kinda cold.”

The John Beargrease was cancelled this year but Allie will continue to train to be the best “Musher” as long as there is snow!
Lowry Award Winners

The Lowry Award is given bi-monthly to recognize workers in ABC’s Extended Employment programs for their outstanding progress towards goals and improvement in overall work performance.

Winners of the Lowry Award are then eligible for the annual Employee of the Year Award.

Anne MacGillivary has worked at Ability Enterprises since 1991. She was a member of the Sleep Inn Suites housekeeping team and recently started a new job with a custodial crew for the City of Chatfield.

Kerri Vangness, Ability Enterprises Program Coordinator nominated Anne because, “She has been doing very well with work performance, practicing good social skills with her peers and has demonstrated a willingness to work hard and listen to the job coach.”

Congratulations, Anne! Keep up the good work!

David Henderson has been a member of Ability Enterprises since 1993. David does light custodial duties at Chateau Theatre, Planned Parenthood and Mount Olive Lutheran Church.

Kelly Voigt, Ability Enterprises Program Manager said, “David is an exceptional individual. His positive attitude and work ethic set him apart from the rest of the team. David is versatile; willing to give 110% everyday, try most any job task set before him, and takes pride in all that he does.”

Great job, David! Keep up the good work!

Woodland’s Outstanding Worker

Congratulations go out to Jerry Kurtz Jr. for earning the W.O.W. Award for the first quarter of 2007. Jerry is described by his supervisors and coworkers as very helpful and hard working. He is very independent on most jobs, finds and reports any errors or safety concerns, and has a very positive attitude. He is always willing to learn new jobs and has a great attendance record.

Great job, Jerry! Keep up the exceptional work!
What's new at ABC?

Transportation

As programs in Houston and Olmsted Counties grow, so does the need for transportation. ABC’s vehicle fleet transports participants to and from ABC, work sites, Woodland Industries and community outings.

ABC was able to purchase two new wheelchair accessible vans in 2006 thanks to the generosity of Harold and Virginia Payne. This significantly increases the number of wheelchair participants that can take part in work and recreational activities in the community.

Digital Imaging

ABC provides a diverse range of programs for a diverse population of participants. So it’s no big surprise that we are equally committed to providing a diverse range of employment and vocational training opportunities to our clients. Along with newly-hired business developer Steve Kelley, ABC has responded to a growing need for businesses trying to go paperless. Digital document conversion services are the newest addition to ABC’s long list of capabilities. We continue to grow this piece of business through partnerships with hardware and software providers and through promoting the service to new and existing customers. If you or your business could use all that space in the back hallway currently housing 27 years worth of timecards and receipts, call Steve Kelley at 535 - 7116 to arrange a solution.

Abilities Unlimited 2

Thank you to everyone who donated so generously to the AU2 renovation project. This space was badly needed, as we had reached our program capacity for AU1 and were having trouble finding space for all our referrals. Now that we have a new area, new programming has begun which focuses on teaching independent living skills and prevocational development.

We are also trying a new program philosophy which allows us to be more flexible with our scheduling depending upon the flow of the day. Over $31,000 in donations were received.

Thank you again for all the generosity!

Brett Graham, Program Manager

"Thank you for your support of ABC and its programs. Donations help provide the services I need to hopefully get a job someday with my disability, and improve myself. I am still taking it one day at a time."

Steve Z.

“I just want to take a moment to express my gratitude for the professional job your company performed during our document imaging and document archive project. Having a local company with this capability, and their ability to work on site, was a plus to the success of this project. Your staff was very professional, and I would recommend them highly.”

-Dale O’Groske, CFO, United Way of Olmsted County, Inc.
Twice Is Nice 2 Opens Its Doors

On February 5th Twice Is Nice 2 opened up at 29 S Walnut Street in LaCrescent! The second hand clothing store is an extension of the original Twice Is Nice which is operated in Caledonia by Woodland Industries.

The store is managed by Laura Birnbaum, a Job Coach for ABC Works. Laura has done an exceptional job decorating, organizing and marketing the business. Several participants including Jed Wohlegemuth, Jason Stinson, Erica Neuman, Alicia Wolter, Jim Belles and Howard Dorvial have been helping out with customer service and sales.

Donations of clean folded clothing are being accepted at ABC Works in LaCrescent at 62 N 3rd St. As the items arrive, participants sort, hang, price and transport them to the store. If you would like us to pick up your donations at your home, call us at 895-7161 and we will be glad to do it!

The store hours are M-F from 9:00am-4:30pm and on Saturdays from 9:00am -1:00pm.

Growing Together Campaign comes to a close!

Our Growing Together capital campaign for the expansion project in LaCrescent raised $288,234.80 over the past three years! The expansion project tripled the building size of ABC Works and has been well received by participants, families and community members. The new facility has much to offer including a large production area, leisure area, therapy room, a state of the art lift system in the restroom, new office areas and a sprinkler system throughout the building. The added space has provided opportunities for participants living in the community that previously had to commute to Caledonia for services. Small Change Laundry service also operates out of this site as well as storage/prep room for Twice Is Nice 2.

Thanks to everyone’s support and donations that helped make this project a huge success!

Ability Building Center Board Welcomes

In October Ability Building Center Board welcomed Katherine (Kate) Piderman, PAD

She was born and raised in Vancouver, BC, but is now proud to call Minnesota home. She has been a staff chaplain at Mayo Clinic for 11 years, and served in the Mayo Hospice program, the Addiction programs, and the Rehabilitation and Medical Psychiatry Units. In addition to ministry to patients and families, Kate is also involved in research and teaching in the area of spirituality and health. Her volunteer activities include a commitment to pet therapy with Labradors Grace and Zoé.
Tributes and Memorials

ABC is honored to have received gifts from family, friends and loved ones in memory or those who have died and in tribute to others who live on. The following gifts were received through February 27, 2007.

In Honor of:  
Fred & Pat Ableitner  
Wally Bigelow  
Deb Byers  
Curtis Cady  
Jane Campion  
Dawn Deno  
Olivia Frances Eytcheson  
Tom Fenstermacher  
Gabriella  
Steve Hill  
John Lloyd  
Ann MacGillivray  
Rick Nelson  
Susan Olson  
Cindy Nichols  
Jeff & Jane Raddatz  
RCTC Cafeteria Crew  
Justin Riekmann

In Memory of:  
Grace Franz  
Pat & Molly Bigelow  
John & June Franklin  
Elsie Harland  
Claire Bender  
Ron & Grace Deno  
Peter & Margaret Coleman  
Huberta Fenstermacher  
Joan Gravett  
Steve & Joan Larson  
Don & Paula Lloyd  
Don & Arlysse MacGillivray  
Trudy Nelson  
Duane Olson  
Fred & Marlys Wagner  
Lawrence & Lucille Wehrs  
Phil & Sheryl Scholer  
Eugene & Marilyn Wojtczak  
Richard Bedard  
Joyce Bierbaum  
Bonnie Blazing  
Dick and Ann Ferguson  
John Gillespie  
Marvin Heyer  
Dorothy Kahn  
Charles William “Bill” Macken  
Anna McGee  
Alan Nelson  
Linda Pearson  
Doris Prescher  
Norb Staggmeyer  
Virgina Sexton  
Karin Siggelkow  
Melissa Stucky  
Wallace Supple  
Valery Thillen  
Will Thurk  
Tony Tschida Sr.  
Leslie Weber  
Angeline Wehrs  
Dennis Zortman

In Memory

Justin MacMasters, a School to Work (STW) participant, passed away December 18 at St. Mary’s Hospital, due to complications of Cystic Fibrosis.

Justin was 18 years old and attended the Transition to Adult Program (TAP). Justin had been with the STW program since September 15, 2004 and also attended Mayo High School at that time. Justin had worked in General Services in the Sewing Department and did job tryouts in the community. Most recently, Justin was working on a custodial enclave at Mount Olive Lutheran Church. He was very happy to be working on an enclave and enjoyed the job.

Anyone who knew Justin would say that he was a happy and positive person. Justin was laid back and easy to get along with. He was always willing to try new work experiences. Justin was a joy to work with. He will be greatly missed by all.

A special thank you to the parishioners of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church for their generosity!

Each year ABC participants look forward to the annual Christmas meal and entertainment.
ABC’s Annual Golf Tournament

You are invited to participate in Ability Building Center’s Annual Golf Tournament on Wednesday, June 27, 2007, at Willow Creek Golf Course. Once again there will be many featured auction items, prizes, awards, games, and of course golfing. After a fun-filled afternoon of golfing, you can sit back and enjoy the program while eating a buffet dinner.

All proceeds raised will benefit ABC programs and services. So grab your clubs and join the staff of ABC and our tournament sponsors “On the Tee” at 1:00pm.

For more information on how you can help ABC reach their goal of raising $50,000, be a sponsor, golfer, donate items and/or services to the auction, call Larry Erickson at 535-7106.